Witness Lee

THE KINGDOM

LIVING STREAM MINISTRY

THE KINGDOM

by Witness Lee

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PREFACE

Although the kingdom occupies a very crucial position in the Bible, many Christians have not understood it properly, accurately, or adequately. The messages in this book, given in a conference in 1972 in Los Angeles, present mainly the life side of the kingdom. While some chapters touch the doctrinal and objective side, the primary burden is the life side. May these chapters cause the Lord's children to soberly consider their responsibility toward the kingdom and to aspire to live today in the reality of the kingdom by the divine life so that they may enter into the enjoyment of the kingdom in its manifestation with the Lord in the coming age.

Witness Lee
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CHAPTER ONE

THE KINGDOM IN THE NEW TESTAMENT

Scripture Reading: Matt. 3:1-2; 10:7; 16:19a; 4:17, 23; 24:14; John 3:3, 5; Luke 4:43; 9:2a, 60; Acts 1:3; 8:12a; 19:8; 20:25; 28:23b, 31; Rom. 14:17; Col. 1:13; 4:11b; 1 Thes. 2:12; 2 Thes. 1:5b; 2 Tim. 4:18a; Heb. 12:28a; James 2:5; 2 Pet. 1:3-4, 11; Rev. 1:9a; 12:10a; 11:15

According to Genesis 1, God created man in His own image and gave man His authority to rule over all the created things. In God's creation two things are very important to man. One is the divine image, and the other is the divine authority. Man is in the image of God in order to express God, and he has received God's authority in order to represent God. We need God's authority to represent God and to subdue His enemy. God desires for man to subdue the earth and particularly His enemy, Satan.

In order to have the full image of God to express God and to realize the full authority of God to represent God in subduing His enemy, we must have God as life to us. Therefore, in the first two chapters of Genesis, there is not only image and authority but also life, signified by the tree of life. We need to take in the divine life of God for two reasons: positively, so that we can express God; negatively, so that we can represent God to subdue His enemy. The authority of God is a matter of the kingdom. Throughout the entire Scriptures there is a line of authority related to the kingdom.

Before God could come into man as life and carry out His purpose, the subtle serpent caused man to fall. Due to the fall, the race of Adam failed God, so He chose another race, that of Noah. That race also failed God, and He chose a third race, the race of Abraham. According to Genesis 12:1-3, God chose Abraham with the intention of having a kingdom. God promised to make Abraham a great nation. This means that He would make of him a kingdom.

What is the kingdom of God? It simply means the rule or government of God. God must have the kingdom to exercise His authority in order to fulfill His purpose. This is why in the prayer of the Lord Jesus in Matthew 6, He prayed something at the very beginning and at the very end concerning the

kingdom. At the beginning of the prayer He said, “Your kingdom come,” and at the end of the prayer He said, “Yours is the kingdom.” He prayed concerning the kingdom because God’s purpose depends so much on the kingdom. If God does not have a kingdom in which He can exercise His authority, then He is very limited. Therefore, God chose Abraham and his descendants to be a nation, a kingdom. This is how the people of Israel came into being. After the Lord brought the people of Israel out of Egypt, He said to them, “You shall be to Me a kingdom of priests and a holy nation” (Exo. 19:6).

In the New Testament, when John the Baptist came preaching, his first words were, “Repent, for the kingdom of the heavens has drawn near” (Matt. 3:2). When the Lord Jesus went out to preach, He said the same thing: “Repent, for the kingdom of the heavens has drawn near” (4:17). When the Lord Jesus sent out the twelve disciples in Luke 9 and the seventy disciples in Luke 10, He told them to preach concerning the kingdom. Eventually, in the last book of the Scriptures, Revelation, we are told that “the kingdom of the world has become the kingdom of our Lord and of His Christ, and He will reign forever and ever” (11:15). The Lord will reign as a King with all His overcoming saints. Thus, at the very end of the Scriptures we can see that God eventually will have a kingdom in which He can exercise His authority to the fullest extent in accomplishing His eternal purpose. Have you ever realized that there is such a line in the Scriptures? It is only through the kingdom that God can exercise His authority to accomplish His eternal purpose. In nearly every book of the New Testament, from Matthew to Revelation, the kingdom is covered. The kingdom is such a great matter in the Bible. After His resurrection the Lord Jesus spoke with the apostles for forty days concerning the kingdom (Acts 1:3). The apostle Paul spent three months in the synagogue at Ephesus reasoning and persuading concerning the kingdom of God (19:8).

Although the kingdom is covered throughout the New Testament, most Christians have not seen it in an adequate way. For century after century, the churches have not seen it properly. Most books on this matter of the kingdom say that the kingdom is simply a dispensation or that it is a sphere, a realm, in which God rules. However, if we regard the kingdom as merely a dispensation or a realm, our understanding falls far short. The kingdom is greater, higher, and deeper than this.

We need to see the matter of the kingdom because it is very much related to the inner life and also to the church life. If we would realize and experience

the proper church life, we have to see something concerning the kingdom of the heavens. Also, if we would experience the inner life in a practical way, we must know something of the kingdom of the heavens.

"REPENT, FOR THE KINGDOM"

The first item in the New Testament preaching was the kingdom. The first preacher in the New Testament was John the Baptist, and the first word out of his mouth was, "Repent, for the kingdom" (Matt. 3:1-2). It is not merely a matter of being sinful, of going to hell, or of having peace and joy. It is not merely a matter of repenting so that we may have salvation. We must repent for the kingdom.

The word *repent* means to change your mind, to have a change in your way of thinking. It means to change your way of reasoning, to change your concepts, ideas, philosophy, and even your theology. We all need to repent. Repent from your old concepts. Repent from philosophy and systematic theology. Repent from the old Bible knowledge, from the old expositions and interpretations of the Scriptures. We need to change our point of view.

Why must we repent for the kingdom? Because, regardless of the concepts we cling to, we are not for the kingdom. You may be for education or for religion. You may be for Christianity or for so-called churches. You may be for gospel preaching or for the mission field. You may be for doing good. You may be zealous for the spiritual gifts, or you may be seeking the power of God. I do not know what you are for, but I am afraid you may not be for the kingdom. You must repent. Repent from what you are. Repent from where you are. Repent from what you are doing and what you are thinking. Repent from all your concepts. I do not care and God does not care whether your concept is good or bad. That means nothing. As long as you are not for the kingdom, it makes no difference. We all must repent for the kingdom. The New Testament is for the kingdom. When the New Testament age comes, the kingdom comes. If you are not in the kingdom, if you are not living for the kingdom, you need to repent.

THE PREACHING OF JESUS

John the Baptist began the New Testament preaching by saying, "Repent, for the kingdom" (Matt. 3:2). Then the Lord Jesus came and repeated the

preaching of John the Baptist (4:17). It is a shame that preachers today do not like to repeat the preaching of others. If one man should preach, "Repent, for the kingdom," another will preach something new. They do not like to follow others' preaching. The Lord Jesus, however, became a follower. He followed John the Baptist. The Lord Jesus was not the first one who preached repentance for the kingdom; He was the second. It is marvelous that the Lord Jesus repeated and continued the preaching of John the Baptist. Surely this shows the importance of the kingdom. If the preaching of the kingdom were not so important, then the Lord Jesus would not have repeated it. Because He repeated the preaching of John the Baptist, we have a strong proof that the preaching of the kingdom was very important.

THE PREACHING OF THE DISCIPLES

The Lord Jesus called some disciples, not only twelve but also at least seventy. He sent them out and charged them to preach the kingdom, saying, "The kingdom of the heavens has drawn near" (10:7; Luke 10:1, 9). Not only did the Lord Himself repeat and continue the preaching of the gospel of the kingdom, but He also charged His disciples to repeat it.

According to Luke, a man came saying, "Lord, permit me to go first and bury my father." The Lord responded, "Let the dead bury their own dead, but you go and announce the kingdom of God everywhere" (9:59-60). The Lord seemed to be saying, "Let the dead ones do the dead things. If you want to be living, you must follow Me and preach the kingdom of God. Let the dead ones bury the dead, but the living ones must preach the gospel of the kingdom." John the Baptist preached the kingdom, the Lord Jesus preached the kingdom, and all His disciples were charged to preach the kingdom. Even such a little disciple as was mentioned in Luke was told to preach the kingdom. This is wonderful!

THE GOSPEL OF THE KINGDOM

When the Lord Jesus was preparing to leave His disciples, He prophesied that the gospel of the kingdom would be preached in the whole inhabited earth and to all the nations (Matt. 24:14). Some Bible teachers have taught that the kingdom is a dispensational matter. They have taught that the Lord came with the kingdom and presented it to the Jewish people. When they rejected Him, He took back the kingdom and suspended it until another age.

According to their teaching, this is the age of the church and not the age of the kingdom. The kingdom has been suspended and will come again one day. When the Lord comes back, He will bring with Him the suspended kingdom. This kind of teaching is not according to the pure Word of God. According to the Bible, the kingdom of God has never been suspended. In Matthew 21:43 the Lord Jesus said that the kingdom of God would be taken from the Jewish people and be given to another nation, that is, to the church. This indicates that the kingdom has never been suspended. If the kingdom has been suspended, there would have been no need for the Lord, after His resurrection, to speak to His disciples concerning the kingdom for forty days (Acts 1:3). When I was young, I took in this teaching, thinking that it was wonderful because I had learned something about the Bible. However, eventually I realized that I was taught incorrectly.

Matthew 24:14 speaks of the "gospel of the kingdom," not the gospel of grace or the gospel of salvation. Although many of you have read the book of Matthew several times, you may have never noticed the term the *gospel of the kingdom*. Yet the Lord Jesus said that this gospel of the kingdom will be preached in the whole inhabited earth. The whole inhabited earth means every place inhabited by man. The gospel of the kingdom must be preached in the whole inhabited earth for a testimony to all the nations. It will not only be preached to the Jews but to all the nations. In Greek the word translated "nations" is the same word that is elsewhere translated "Gentiles." The gospel of the kingdom will be preached to all the Gentiles. Hallelujah! Most of us are Gentiles. We are all privileged to hear the gospel of the kingdom. This gospel must be preached to every corner of the inhabited earth. The Lord has opened up this matter to us so that wherever we go with the recovery of the church, the gospel of the kingdom will be preached.

THE KINGDOM OF GOD AS THE GOSPEL

In Luke 4:43 we have another term: *the gospel of the kingdom of God*. This verse says that the Lord Jesus and His disciples announced the kingdom of God as the gospel. Have you ever noticed that the preaching of the kingdom of God is just the preaching of the gospel? The kingdom is the gospel of the New Testament. The gospel of the New Testament is the kingdom.

Some may argue that the New Testament speaks of the gospel of life, the gospel of grace, and the gospel of salvation. However, all these are different

aspects of the kingdom. The kingdom is the center, the hub, and all the other items may be considered as the spokes. All the spokes are centered on the hub. The gospel of life is for the kingdom, the gospel of salvation is for the kingdom, and the gospel of forgiveness is for the kingdom. All these different aspects of the gospel are for the kingdom. The kingdom is the real gospel. Our concept needs to be changed. Formerly, we may have thought that the gospel is the gospel and that the kingdom is something else. We realized that we needed the gospel, but we probably relegated the kingdom to the future. This is absolutely wrong. The kingdom is the gospel. If we do not know the kingdom, we do not know the gospel in a full way. If we want to know the gospel in a full way, we must realize that the kingdom is the all-inclusive gospel. The Lord Jesus and His disciples preached the kingdom of God as the gospel.

BORN AGAIN TO ENTER THE KINGDOM

Since Mark is in many respects similar to Matthew and Luke, we may pass over it for now and come to the Gospel of John. Let us consider John 3:3 and 5. Did the Lord Jesus say, "Unless one is born of water and the Spirit, he cannot see heaven or enter into heaven"? No! Regeneration is not for the purpose of going to heaven, although I was definitely taught this when I was young. I was told that my sinful life was simply not good enough for me to go to heaven and that entering heaven required me to have a better life. I was told that heaven is bright, with nothing dark; it is holy, with nothing sinful; and it is good, with nothing evil. But I was told that I was evil, dark, and sinful—altogether unqualified to go to heaven. I was told that if I wanted to go to heaven, I needed another life. I needed to be born again. This is still the common concept today. Strictly speaking, regeneration is not for entering heaven; regeneration is for us to enter into the kingdom.

If we want to enter into a certain kind of kingdom, we need a certain kind of life. If we do not have the animal life, we can never enter the animal kingdom. If I could receive a dog's life and become a dog, I would immediately find myself in the animal kingdom. Likewise, if we do not have the divine life, the life of God, we can never enter into the kingdom of God. If we are to enter into the kingdom of God, we must have the life of God. Therefore, regeneration is for us to enter into another kingdom, the kingdom of God. This is much more real than a mere dispensation. This is the kingdom of God, which we enter by being born again.

We have pointed out in other publications that John is not only a book of life but also a book of building. However, it is also a book of the kingdom. Both life and building are for the kingdom. Life is for the building, and the building is for the kingdom.

THE KINGDOM IN THE ACTS

Some Christians say that after the Lord Jesus was crucified and resurrected, He suspended the kingdom and that another dispensation, the dispensation of the church, began on the day of Pentecost. In other words, they say that the kingdom was temporarily set aside, and the church age began. However, Acts 1:3 says that the Lord Jesus spoke with His disciples concerning the kingdom for forty days following His resurrection. Furthermore, after Pentecost, Philip preached the kingdom of God to the Samaritans (8:12). Also, Acts 19:8 says that the apostle Paul preached the kingdom of God. In Acts 20:25 Paul told the elders at Ephesus that when he was with them he had preached the kingdom of God. When Paul was in Rome, he talked to people about the kingdom of God (28:23b, 31). In the light of all these references, how could people say that the kingdom has been suspended?

THE KINGDOM IN THE EPISTLES

The kingdom is also revealed in the Epistles. Romans 14:17 says, "The kingdom of God is not eating and drinking, but righteousness and peace and joy in the Holy Spirit." According to the context of Romans 14, the kingdom is the church life. The reality of the church life is the kingdom. The kingdom is not merely a dispensation or a sphere; the kingdom is righteousness, peace, and joy in the Holy Spirit. The kingdom of God is something in the Holy Spirit. This is the church life. Later we will see that Romans 12 tells us about the Body life and that Romans 14 speaks of the kingdom life. In Romans the kingdom life is simply the reality of the Body life.

In 1 Corinthians the kingdom of God refers to the real church life (4:20; 6:9-10; 15:50). Also, both Galatians and Ephesians tell us the same thing—that the kingdom in the Spirit is the proper church life (Gal. 5:21; Eph. 5:5).

Now we come to Colossians 1:13: God has "delivered us out of the authority of darkness." The authority of darkness is the kingdom of Satan. God has

delivered us out of the kingdom of Satan and has "transferred us into the kingdom of the Son of His love." We all have been transferred. Once we were in the kingdom of Satan, but now we are in the kingdom of God's Son. Hallelujah! What a transfer! Have you been transferred? We all must testify boldly, "I have been transferred from the kingdom of Satan into the kingdom of God!" Forget about yourself and look to the Lord Jesus. You must say, "Hallelujah! I have been transferred! I am in the kingdom of God!"

Perhaps you have been told that the kingdom of God will come some day in the future and that today, the age of the church, has nothing to do with the kingdom. Perhaps you have heard that the church age is now and that the coming age, the millennium, will be the age of the kingdom. But here in Colossians 1:13 we are told that we have been transferred into the kingdom. Are you sure that you have been transferred into the kingdom of God? If today is the church age and the kingdom has not yet come, how can you be in the kingdom now? Are you certain that you are in the kingdom now? I am very concerned that after you put this book down, you will start to doubt. You may begin to think that it is too much to say that we are presently in the kingdom of God. You may look at your wife and think, "Rebellious!" You may look at your husband and say, "No love!" You may look at your children and say, "Too sloppy, too loose!" Whether you believe we are in the kingdom or not, we have the pure Word. We have Colossians 1:13. Hallelujah! We have all been transferred into the kingdom of the Son of His love.

In Colossians 4:11 Paul tells us something further about the kingdom. He says that he and his co-workers worked for the kingdom of God. What are you doing in the city where you are? We all need to be able to declare in a definite way that we are working for the kingdom.

First Thessalonians 2:12 tells us that we have been called into the kingdom. Christianity talks about being called into heaven. I cannot find a verse telling us that we have been called into the heavens, but we do have a verse telling us that we have been called by God into His kingdom and glory. Also, 2 Thessalonians 1:5 says that we are worthy of the kingdom. This is wonderful! In 2 Timothy 4:18 Paul was assured that the Lord would save him into His heavenly kingdom. Paul did not say that God would save him into the heavenly mansions but into the heavenly kingdom. Then, Hebrews 12:28 says that we have received an unshakable kingdom. We have received a kingdom that can never be shaken. Hallelujah! James 2:5 says that we are those who

love God and that we are heirs of the kingdom. We shall inherit the kingdom. This is our hope. Second Peter 1:3 says that His divine power has granted to us all things which relate to life and godliness. So we are partakers of the divine nature (v. 4). This is for a rich entrance into the kingdom (v. 11). All things pertaining to life and godliness, even partaking of the divine nature, are for a rich entrance into the kingdom.

THE KINGDOM IN REVELATION

Revelation 1:9 says, "I John, your brother and fellow partaker in the tribulation and kingdom." John knew that he was in the kingdom. To him the kingdom was not merely a future dispensation; he was in the kingdom already. Therefore, he could say I am "your brother and fellow partaker in the...kingdom."

One day the kingdom of God will be manifested. That will be the fulfillment of Revelation 12:10. The kingdom of God will come in full manifestation. The kingdom of the world will "become the kingdom of our Lord and of His Christ" (11:15). He will reign as King forever and ever.

CHAPTER TWO

THE COMING OF THE KINGDOM AND ITS PROCESS

Scripture Reading: Matt. 19:8; Luke 17:20-21; Matt. 13:55-56; 12:28; Col. 1:13; Matt. 16:28; Mark 9:1; Matt. 17:1-2; Mark 4:26-29; Luke 18:29; Mark 10:29; John 3:3-5; 2 Pet. 1:3-4, 11; Mark 10:17, 23

When the Lord Jesus came, there was a religion called Judaism. It was not a pagan, heathen religion; it was a religion worshipping and serving God, a religion formed according to God's divine Word. If you had lived at the time of the Lord Jesus, would you have taken sides with the Lord Jesus or with Judaism? I believe that every one of us would have taken sides with Judaism. Judaism was not a pagan religion. Its temple and its altar were according to God's Word. The sacrifices and offerings were according to God's Word. The priesthood, the worship, and the service were all according to God's Word. Have you considered, however, that when the Lord Jesus came He did not care about Judaism at all? He crossed out whatever Judaism was doing. Judaism kept the Sabbath, but He worked on the Sabbath. The Pharisees, the Judaizers, sent out the "Sabbath Patrol," and they caught Him breaking the Sabbath.

Christianity is now five hundred years older than Judaism was during the time of the Lord Jesus and the apostles. When the Lord Jesus and His apostles were on the earth, Judaism was only fifteen hundred years old, but Christianity is nearly two thousand years old. We are facing a religion that is five hundred years older than Judaism was to the Lord Jesus.

I believe that most of you have received some teaching about the kingdom from Christianity, but I would ask you to come back to the pure Word. When the Pharisees came to argue with the Lord Jesus concerning divorce, they said various things, but the Lord Jesus replied, "From the beginning it has not been so" (Matt. 19:8). Let us come back to the beginning. Forget about the traditional teachings and come back to the beginning to see the kingdom from the pure Word.

THE KINGDOM COMING WITHOUT OBSERVATION

In Luke 17:20-21 the Pharisees came to the Lord Jesus asking about the kingdom of God. Like many Christians today, they had their own concepts. However, the Lord Jesus immediately told them that the kingdom of God does not come with observation—that if they were looking for the kingdom, they would be unable to observe it. What does it mean that the kingdom does not come with observation? It means that the kingdom is invisible. The kingdom is something that you cannot observe by your natural ability. Therefore, do not exercise your thinking, your understanding, your knowledge, or your comprehension. They are completely useless in apprehending the kingdom of God.

When the Lord Jesus said that the kingdom does not come with observation, He did not mean that the kingdom could not be realized. For example, if you had no ears, you could never realize my speaking. You simply could not observe my speaking because you lack the substantiating and realizing ability. That realizing ability is the listening organ, the ear. You need to have the listening organ and also need to exercise it. Then you can observe my speaking. The Lord told the Pharisees that the kingdom did not come with their observation. Their kind of observation was wrong. They depended upon their mentality and exercised their knowledge too much. By their natural ability, they were utterly unable to observe the kingdom of God. To them, the kingdom of God came without observation.

THE KINGDOM BEING IN THEIR MIDST

In Luke 17:21 the Greek word rendered "within" by the King James Version means both "within" and "in the midst," and it is hard to determine the exact meaning in this verse. I believe that the Lord's word implies both aspects. Since the Lord Jesus was present with them, the kingdom of God was in their midst. Do not say, "Here is the kingdom" or "There is the kingdom." "Behold, the kingdom of God is in the midst of you." What is this? This is the Lord Jesus. Where He is, there is the kingdom of God. Let me ask you: Do you not believe that the Lord Jesus was observed at that time by all the Pharisees? Some said, "Is not this the carpenter's son? Is not His mother called Mary, and His brothers James and Joseph and Simon and Judas? And His sisters, are they not all with us?" (Matt. 13:55-56). They knew all this and still were unable to observe the kingdom. The Lord Jesus was in their midst as the

kingdom, but they were unable to observe Him because they were using the wrong organ. They needed to use the proper organ—their spirit. When the Lord Jesus was among them, He was not only a man but also the embodiment of God. They needed to realize this in their spirit. Because they failed to realize this, He was in their midst, but He was unable to be in them. If they had observed God in their spirit, He would have immediately come inside of them as the kingdom.

Since the kingdom is the Lord Jesus, and He was present with the Pharisees, why did they ask Him "when the kingdom of God was coming"? It was because they paid too much attention to the mental knowledge of the Bible in letters. They simply did not know how to exercise their inward part, that is, their human spirit. By their outward man and by their natural ability, they were unable to observe that the Lord Jesus was the reality of the kingdom. Although the Lord Jesus, the kingdom of God, was present, they could not observe Him. If they had observed Him by the exercise of their spirit, this wonderful One would have come inside of them immediately. He would have been not only in their midst but also inside of them. Whether the Lord Jesus was only in their midst or also inside of them depended on whether or not they exercised their spirit to observe Him.

THE KINGDOM BEING THE LORD JESUS AS THE SPIRIT

We may say that the kingdom is the Lord Jesus, but it must be the Lord Jesus as the Spirit, not in the flesh. The kingdom is the Lord Jesus as the Spirit. He said to the Pharisees, "If I, by the Spirit of God, cast out the demons, then the kingdom of God has come upon you" (Matt. 12:28). This verse tells us that the kingdom is simply the reality of the Spirit of God. When the Spirit of God is made real, this realization is the kingdom. The Lord Jesus said that because He cast out demons by the power of the Spirit of God, this indicated that the kingdom of God was there. The kingdom is the spiritual realization of the Lord Jesus. When we realize Him spiritually, we have the kingdom.

The Spirit of God is the reality of the Lord Jesus. The Spirit is His person, and His person is His reality. Just as the reality of a man is his person, so the reality of the Lord Jesus is His person, and His person is the Spirit. He had the Spirit with Him, and the Spirit was His person. This person, the Spirit, was the reality of the Lord Jesus. At that time, His reality was fully exercised by casting out demons. Thus, that was the kingdom of God. Now we can see

that the kingdom is not merely a dispensation or sphere. The kingdom is the realization of the reality of the Lord Jesus.

Colossians 1:13 contrasts two things—the authority of darkness and the kingdom of Christ. We were in the authority of darkness, but one day we were transferred into the kingdom of Christ. Sometimes a contrast enables us to understand things more clearly. By seeing the negative we can know the positive. The kingdom of Christ is in contrast with the authority of darkness. It is not merely a dispensation or a sphere. The kingdom is something so real. It is the realization of the reality of the Lord Jesus.

Many of you have been told that you were in Adam and that one day God transferred you out of Adam into Christ. Now you need to realize further that since you are in Christ, you are also in the kingdom because Christ is the kingdom. Suppose there is a naughty boy, born in Adam. One day he hears the gospel, calls upon the name of the Lord, and is transferred out of Adam into Christ. He was born in Adam, but now he is in Christ. Although this young brother has been transferred into Christ, he may lack the proper realization of Christ. Doctrinally, when he is in Christ, he is also in the kingdom. Experientially however, he may have been in Christ for five years but still may not be in the kingdom. He has been transferred into Christ, yet he is still disobedient. Once he was a naughty boy; now he is a naughty brother. I cannot say that he is not in Christ or that he is not a brother, but experientially he is not in the kingdom, because he does not realize the reality of the Lord Jesus. When he realizes the reality of the Lord Jesus, he will be not only in Christ but also in the kingdom.

To be in the kingdom means to have a full realization of the reality of the Lord Jesus. The Lord Jesus said that if He cast out demons by the Spirit, then the kingdom of God had come upon them. A demon is a dirty, unclean, evil spirit, but the principle of being a demon simply means rebellion. Originally, demons were a kind of created being. When Satan rebelled against God, they followed him and became demons. Therefore, demons indicate rebellion. If in your daily walk there are some things that are not under God's ruling, some things still in rebellion against God, those things in principle are demons. They need to be cast out by the Lord Jesus. We must pray, "Lord Jesus, come and cast out my demons. Even today I am rebellious." You may be rebellious in your shopping. Perhaps you went to the department store although the Lord Jesus within you told you not to go. Once in the store, you picked up an

item, and even though the Lord Jesus told you to drop it, you bought it, and you still have it at home. This is rebellion, the principle of a demon.

Are you always under the ruling of Christ? We may say that we love Him yet not accept His ruling. We may say that Christ is our life, but Christ as our life may not be very real to us. It may simply be a term, not a reality. There may be no realization of the reality of Christ being life to us. The life of the Lord Jesus is a ruling life. In every kind of life there is a ruling element, which is its life law and regulation. We may have the life of Christ within and yet not be under the ruling of His life. So, in a sense, we may be still possessed by many demons. We need the Lord Jesus to cast them out. Then we will truly be in the kingdom. The kingdom is the realization of the reality of Christ. We have been transferred out of darkness into the kingdom of Christ. Yet, in our daily living, we may lack the reality of the kingdom. The reality of the kingdom is simply the realization of the reality of the Lord Jesus. When we have the realization of the reality of the Lord Jesus, that realization is the kingdom.

THE COMING OF THE KINGDOM

One day the Lord Jesus told His disciples that some of them would not taste death until they saw the Son of Man coming in His kingdom (Matt. 16:28). According to Mark, He said that some of those standing there would see the kingdom of God having come in power (9:1). Shortly after speaking these words, He went to the mountaintop and was transfigured there (Matt. 17:1-2). The transfiguration of the Lord Jesus was the realization of what He is. When He was confined in His flesh, people thought of Him as only a little man from Nazareth. The kingdom was in Him, but they could not see it. The kingdom was in Him just as electricity is in a building—unless the switch is turned on, no one can observe the electricity. Once the switch is turned on, the lamp will shine. This shining is simply the expression of electricity. The kingdom of God was in the Lord Jesus, but it was concealed, covered, and confined within His flesh. He stood among the Pharisees, yet they could not observe that something wonderful was in Him. Even His own disciples could not see it. After six days He went to the mountaintop, and there He was “switched on.” He was shining. His shining came from within, not from the heavens. Something within Him was shining. Although this reality was present within Him before His transfiguration, people could not observe it. However, at His transfiguration His disciples could observe something shining out from within Him.

We may say that this was the shining of the Lord Jesus or the transfiguration of the Lord Jesus, but He Himself said that it was the coming of the kingdom. The shining forth of the Lord Jesus on the mountaintop was the coming of the kingdom. This is not merely a dispensation or a sphere. Our vocabulary is inadequate to describe it. The transfiguration, the shining of the Lord Jesus on the mountain, was the coming of the kingdom in power! The kingdom is simply the Lord Jesus shining over you. I hope this sentence will make a deep impression on you: the kingdom is the shining of the Lord Jesus, and the kingdom is the spreading of the Lord Jesus by shining over you. He told Peter, James, and John that they would see Him coming in His kingdom—that they would see the kingdom of God having come in power. What did they see? They saw the shining of the Lord Jesus. When Peter, James, and John were all under His shining, they were in the kingdom. Also, the dead saints, represented by Moses, and the living saints, represented by Elijah, appeared and were under the shining of the spreading of the Lord Jesus.

Let me illustrate: suppose there are five brothers living together in a brothers' house. If these brothers are really under the shining of the Lord Jesus, the kingdom will be there in that brothers' house. Whenever you visit them, you will sense the shining, the reigning, the ruling, and the good order. Although you would find no list of regulations, everything is kept in order by the shining. Suppose, however, they do not live under the shining, but rather they criticize and despise one another while pretending to love one another. If you visit them, you will have the spiritual sensation that you are in a cemetery. Although everything is quiet, there is the dreadful presence of death. Although no one is fighting and everything is in order, death and the authority of darkness are still there. There is no shining.

The kingdom is the shining of the reality of the Lord Jesus. Whenever He is shining over you and you are under that shining, you are in the kingdom. Although it is not easy to describe or define the kingdom, I believe that now you have at least a little understanding. The kingdom is not merely a dispensation, a sphere, or a realm. It is the realization of the reality of the Lord Jesus. Whenever He is spreading by shining over you, you are in the kingdom, and the kingdom has come in power.

THE PROCESS OF THE KINGDOM

In Mark 4:26-29 the Lord Jesus said that the kingdom is like a man who sows seed into the earth. The seed grows, the blade appears, the ear appears, and finally it is harvested. The kingdom is a seed that is sown into the earth and that grows until it reaches maturity, at which time it is harvested. The seed is the Lord Jesus as the shining One. We all are the soil into which the Lord Jesus as the seed has been sown. The seed grows and eventually will produce the harvest, the full manifestation of the kingdom. Thus, the kingdom is the Lord Jesus as the seed of life who has been sown into us and who grows in us until He reaches maturity at the time of harvest. When the crop is ripe, there will be the harvest, the full manifestation of the kingdom. The growth of the seed within us is the process of the kingdom. On the one hand, we are in the kingdom, but on the other hand, we are in the process of the kingdom. For example, in a wheat field seeds are sown into the soil. The seed then grows until the tender young sprouts appear. The growth continues until the sprouts bring forth ears, fruit, and eventually are fully ripened. Then there is the harvest of the field. This is a picture of the process and manifestation of the kingdom. Now we are in the process of the kingdom. Today we have the seed of the kingdom growing within us. This growth of the kingdom will bring us to the harvest, and that harvest will be the full manifestation of the kingdom.

THE KINGDOM BEING THE GOSPEL

Let us compare Luke 18:29 and Mark 10:29. Luke 18:29 says that we leave certain things for the sake of the kingdom. Mark 10:29 says that we leave the same things for the sake of the gospel. This proves that the kingdom is the gospel. *The kingdom* and *the gospel* are synonymous terms and are used interchangeably. We must declare that the kingdom is the gospel. If we do not realize that the gospel is the kingdom, we are deficient in our understanding of the gospel. The gospel is not only a matter of the forgiveness of sins, redemption, justification, sanctification, or salvation. The gospel is also a matter of the kingdom. What is the kingdom? The kingdom is the Lord Jesus as the seed of life who has come into us. When this seed of life came into us, we were regenerated. By regeneration, we were born into the kingdom (John 3:3, 5). Regeneration was our transfer. By regeneration, we were transferred out of the authority of darkness into the kingdom of God. Hallelujah! This is the genuine gospel!

The entrance into the kingdom is not an outward entrance but is by an inward rebirth. “Unless one is born of water and the Spirit, he cannot enter into the kingdom of God” (v. 5). In other words, when the Lord Jesus comes into us, He brings the kingdom into us. This is why He said that the kingdom is in the midst of you (Luke 17:21). This is the Lord Jesus, the seed of life, sown into us and growing in us all the time. We are in the process of the kingdom.

We come now to 2 Peter 1:3, 4, and 11, which tell us that God’s divine power has granted to us all things relating to life and godliness. By these we become partakers of the divine nature. Since we share the divine nature and all things which relate to life and godliness, we can have a rich entrance into the kingdom. When the Lord Jesus comes into us, He brings with Him all things relating to life and godliness, including the very nature of God. By this we can have a rich entrance into the kingdom. This is the process of the kingdom. Thus, the kingdom is not merely a dispensation.

How do we enter into the kingdom? It is not by learning or by studying or by keeping any outward regulations. It is by regeneration. We enter into the kingdom by the Lord Jesus coming into us and giving us all things relating to life and godliness. All things relating to life and godliness are now inside of us. Do not despise the little seed. That little seed is all-inclusive: the roots, the stalk, the branches, the leaves, the blossom, the fruit—all these things come out of that little seed. All things relating to life and godliness have been given to us, so we are partakers of the divine nature (v. 4). By this we can have a rich entrance into the kingdom—not just an entrance but a rich entrance.

In Mark 10:17-23 a rich young man came to the Lord Jesus, asking how he could inherit eternal life. He thought that he could inherit eternal life by keeping the law. After he left disappointed, the Lord Jesus said that it is difficult for a rich man to enter into the kingdom of God, thus indicating that to enter into the kingdom of God is simply to possess eternal life. They are synonymous terms; they both refer to the same thing.

Thus, the kingdom is the spiritual realization of the Lord Jesus. Whenever He is shining upon us and spreading within us, we are in the kingdom. As the seed of the kingdom, the Lord Jesus has been sown into us. Now we are in the growth process of the kingdom. When the Lord becomes full-grown in us, that will be the time of the manifestation of the kingdom.

CHAPTER THREE

GOD'S GOAL BEING THE KINGDOM

Scripture Reading: Matt. 16:18-19; 1 Cor. 4:17b-20; 6:9-11; Gal. 5:21-22, 24-25; Rom. 14:17; Heb. 12:28

The kingdom is one item of the basic structure of the Scriptures, but it has been neglected by most Christians. The kingdom is the pervading subject in the whole New Testament. It pervades nearly all the books from Matthew through Revelation. Although you may have been a Christian for years, you have probably heard very little about the kingdom. Although the preaching of the New Testament started with the kingdom, and the kingdom is a basic subject of the New Testament, it has been much neglected for centuries because of the subtlety of the enemy.

GOD'S ULTIMATE GOAL

We have said in the past that the church is God's goal, but the ultimate goal of God is the kingdom, not the church. In eternity and for eternity God will have a kingdom. The church is the main part of the kingdom. Consummately, God will have the kingdom for eternity. When the Lord Jesus returns, the church, in a sense, will be completed, but the kingdom, which includes the church, will continue for eternity. God's ultimate and eternal goal is the kingdom.

THE STRATEGY OF SATAN

Satan, the enemy of God, knows God's goal. That is why he will allow you to do many things as long as you are not for the kingdom. God's intention is to build up a kingdom; the enemy's intention is to destroy this kingdom. The enemy will turn people to anything else as long as he can keep them out of the kingdom. If he cannot utilize sinful or worldly things, he may use religious things. As long as you are distracted from the kingdom, Satan will be satisfied.

"REPENT, FOR THE KINGDOM"

The preaching of John the Baptist concerning repentance for the kingdom was not directed to the Gentiles; it was directed to God's people, Israel. His preaching was directed to the religious people who held the holy Word in their hands, the people who tried their best to worship God according to the Scriptures. John did not say, "I am very happy that you are worshipping God. I am here to improve your worship to God. God has sent me to encourage you to offer sacrifices, to burn the incense, to light the lamps, and worship God by singing and praising and giving thanks." Instead, John preached to the religious people, saying, "Repent, for the kingdom."

Where is God's kingdom? The whole earth is filled with demons. We have seen that the principle of a demon is rebellion. Although you may love your wife or submit to your husband or have a good family life, you may not be for the kingdom of God. Whatever you do and whatever you are may be altogether in the principle of a demon. The Lord intends to have a kingdom. Whatever you are, whatever you do, and wherever you go must all be under the ruling of His life. Your style of hair, your manner of dress, and everything else must be under the life-ruling of the Lord Jesus. That is the kingdom.

If you live in a brothers' house, it makes little difference whether you lose your temper or you are patient. If you lose your temper, that is an ugly demon. If you are nice and patient, that is a pretty demon if you are not under the ruling of the kingdom. Whether you lose your temper or you are patient, you are still rebellious against God. Even your silence, your patience, and your niceness may not be under the ruling of the Lord Jesus. Only that which is under the ruling of the Lord Jesus is in the kingdom.

How about your life? How about your daily living and your daily walk? You may be so good in the eyes of men, but in the eyes of the Lord you are not under His ruling. He still does not have a kingdom within you. You may be moral, you may be good, you may be gentle, and you may be religious, but you are not under the ruling of His life. There is no kingdom of the Lord Jesus within you. I hope that the Lord Jesus will open our eyes so that we may see the kingdom. The kingdom is not merely a dispensation or a sphere. The kingdom is simply the Lord Jesus sown into us, growing in us, ruling, governing, reigning, and becoming mature, until there is the harvest, that is, the manifestation of the kingdom.

THE GROWTH PROCESS OF THE KINGDOM

We need to illustrate once again the growth process of the kingdom. In Mark 4:26-29 the Lord used a parable to illustrate the kingdom of God. He said that the kingdom is like a seed sown into the earth, which grows until it is mature, and then is harvested. From the time of the sowing of the seed to the time of harvest is the growth process of the kingdom. The harvest is the full manifestation of the kingdom. By means of this parable we can realize that we are now in the growth process. Suppose I have a tiny carnation seed, which is sown into the earth. After some time, a tender sprout will appear. Then the tender sprout will grow until it reaches the ultimate consummation, the manifestation of the carnation kingdom. Consider some carnation plants in various stages of growth. One is a tender sprout. Another is a plant with a long stem, and another is a plant with buds. Finally, there is a plant in which the buds have become blossoms. This is the full manifestation of the carnation kingdom, starting from the sowing of the seed into the earth and progressing to the full bloom, the ultimate manifestation of the carnation life.

The Lord Jesus told us to pray, "Your kingdom come" (Matt. 6:10). But the kingdom will not come in the way many Christians think. In a sense, the kingdom has come already. In another sense, however, the kingdom is coming. To pick up our illustration once more, in a sense, the carnation kingdom has come already in its seed form. One day, when the carnation reaches full bloom, that will be the full coming of the carnation kingdom. Similarly, the Christ kingdom has come already. From the day He sowed Himself into the human earth, the Christ kingdom began to come. The growth process will continue until the time of the full harvest, at which time there will be the full manifestation of the Christ kingdom.

What is the kingdom? The kingdom is simply Christ sown into us, growing in us, maturing in us, and reaching the time of harvest. The kingdom is not merely a dispensation or a sphere. It is the totality of Christ being life to us in all His activities.

If you visit a zoo, you can see the animal kingdom. Is that just a dispensation or a sphere? If you remove all the animals, the sphere remains, but that is not the animal kingdom. The animal kingdom is the totality of all animal life with all its activities. Birds are flying, monkeys are climbing, and turtles are swimming in the water. The animal kingdom is simply the totality of animal life with all its activities. Likewise, the kingdom of Christ is the totality of Christ being life to us with all His activities. We all have Christ

within us as life, and we have many activities in Christ. This is the kingdom of Christ. Recently, I was watching, observing, and enjoying so many activities of the members in the meeting. You may say that was a church meeting. I agree, but that was also the kingdom of Christ with His life and activities.

THE CHURCH BEING THE KINGDOM OF GOD

We come now to Matthew 16:18-19. These were words spoken by the Lord Jesus to Peter after he received the revelation from the Father that Jesus was the Christ, the Son of the living God. He said that Peter was a stone and that He would build the church upon Himself as the rock. The gates of Hades can never prevail against this church. Then He told Peter that He would give him the keys—not of the church—but of the kingdom. This implies that the church in verse 18 is certainly the kingdom in verse 19, and that the kingdom in verse 19 is surely the church in verse 18. The Lord Jesus promised to give Peter the keys of the kingdom of the heavens. On the day of Pentecost the Lord Jesus gave Peter the key that opened the door for the Jewish people to come in; at the house of Cornelius He gave him the key that opened the door for the Gentiles to come in. After the Lord gave Peter these two keys of the kingdom, the churches were established. First, the church at Jerusalem was established, and later the church among the Gentiles was established. Peter used the keys of the kingdom to establish the churches; this indicates that the churches are the kingdom.

The church is the *ekklesia,* the assembly. This means that the church is the gathering together of the called people of God. The church is also the house of God, His dwelling place. It is also the Body of Christ, meaning that the church is the living expression of Christ. The church is also the bride of Christ, meaning that the church is His love and satisfaction. In addition to all these aspects, the church is also the kingdom. This means that the church is the reigning of God through Christ. The church is the ruling of Christ as a King. No requirements are higher than those of the kingdom. The requirements for the church to be the assembly or the house of God or the Body of Christ or the bride of Christ are not as high as the requirements to be the kingdom of God. No requirements are higher than those mentioned in Matthew 5, 6, and 7. The requirements of the kingdom are high because the church is the reigning of Christ, the ruling of Christ, as a King. If we all will realize that the church is the kingdom, we will have a great change in our living.

THE KINGDOM OF GOD IN FIRST CORINTHIANS

Let us go on to 1 Corinthians 4:17-20. Here we have another proof that the church is the kingdom. Paul says that in every place and in every church he teaches the same thing. Verse 17 appears to be related entirely to the church. However, in verse 20 Paul mentions the kingdom of God. If we read verses 17 and 20 in their context and put all the aspects together, we will see that the real church life is the kingdom. The kingdom is not something in word but in power and impact. The church is the kingdom, and the kingdom is the reality of the church life.

From chapter 4 we proceed to 6:9-11. These verses tell us that the evil, immoral persons who are not under the ruling of the Lord Jesus as the King will have no part in the kingdom. Verse 11 says that although we were such persons in the past, we have been washed, sanctified, and justified in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ and in the Spirit of our God. Pay attention to the three *buts* in this verse: we were such, *but* we were washed, *but* we were sanctified, *but* we were justified in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ and in the Spirit of our God. Now we are in the Spirit. As the context makes clear, since we are in the Spirit, we may surely participate in the kingdom. We are in the kingdom and, in a sense, we are the kingdom.

We need to forget about the traditional teachings and come back to the beginning, back to the pure Word. If we call on the name of the Lord Jesus and pray-read all these verses, we will see exactly the same thing. We will see that the kingdom today is simply the real church life.

THE KINGDOM OF GOD IN GALATIANS

It may be that very few have noticed the term *the kingdom of God* in such a book as Galatians. Once again Paul says that the evil, immoral persons will "not inherit the kingdom of God" (5:21). Then Paul mentions the fruit of the Spirit (v. 22). This is the church life, the Christian walk, and the Christian walk is the kingdom. He goes on to say that we who are of Christ Jesus have crucified the flesh (v. 24). That which has no part in the kingdom of God has been crucified. The flesh and all its lusts have been crucified. We are a crucified people. However, this is just the negative aspect; we also have the positive aspect. In verse 25 we are told that since we have life by the Spirit, we should also walk by the Spirit. To have life by the Spirit and to walk by the

Spirit is the church life, and this church life is the kingdom. From this we can see that the kingdom is not merely something in the future but also something that is present today.

THE KINGDOM OF GOD IN ROMANS

Romans 14:17 is a wonderful verse. It says that "the kingdom of God is not eating and drinking, but righteousness and peace and joy in the Holy Spirit." In other words, the kingdom is altogether a life in the Spirit. A life in the Spirit is the kingdom, and this kingdom is the reality of the church life.

Many Christians cannot see that the church is the kingdom because Christianity is full of confusion and division. Admittedly, it is difficult to say that Christianity is the kingdom. But in the Lord's recovery the kingdom is the church life. The church life is the kingdom of God. The kingdom is not a mere dispensation. Are eating and drinking a dispensation? The kingdom is not eating and drinking; it is righteousness and peace and joy in the Holy Spirit. When we live in the Holy Spirit, we have the spiritual life, and this spiritual life under the ruling of the Lord Jesus is simply the reality of the church life. This is the kingdom that is unshakable (Heb. 12:28). This kingdom can never be shaken, because the gates of Hades cannot prevail against it. The church is the unshakable kingdom.

THE KING AND THE KINGDOM

According to the Bible, the kingdom is the Lord Jesus who came to sow Himself into us as the seed of life. When He sows Himself into us. He becomes the kingdom inside of us. In Himself the Lord Jesus is the King. When He comes into all of us, He is the King plus "dom." The kingdom is simply the King plus "dom." Isaiah 53:2 tells us that this Jesus in the flesh had no beauty or attractiveness that we should desire Him. Yet He is the King! He is the seed of the kingdom. However, this King will never be satisfied to remain by Himself alone. He wants to have the "dom." How can He have the kingdom? By spreading Himself into people like ourselves. The Lord Jesus is the King, and we are the "dom." Thus, we are the kingdom.

CHAPTER FOUR

THE SEED OF THE KINGDOM

Scripture Reading: Matt. 1:1-2, 6, 11, 16-18, 20-21, 23; 2:1-13, 16, 19-20, 22-23

As we have seen, the kingdom is Christ Himself as the seed of life sown into us, growing in us, spreading in us, and maturing in us until there is a full harvest. The full harvest is the manifestation of the kingdom.

In the first chapter of the New Testament we have the record of a wonderful One, Christ, who is recommended to us as the seed of the kingdom. We need a deeper understanding concerning this seed of the kingdom. You may say that the seed of the kingdom is the Lord Jesus, yet your understanding of who He really is may be quite superficial.

THE SPIRIT OF REVELATION

It is easy to read the black and white letters of the Bible. It is also easy to gather some meaning or impression from reading in this way. However, to read the words of the Bible is one thing, but to see the spiritual significance is another. For example, when the Pharisees argued with the Lord Jesus about divorce, even using the Scriptures, He replied in a very unusual way. He said, "From the beginning it has not been so" (Matt. 19:8). On another occasion, the Sadducees argued with the Lord Jesus about the resurrection. They were the modernists of that day who did not believe in the resurrection. They quoted some verses from the Bible, and the Lord Jesus also quoted a verse (22:23-33). He spoke of the title of God from Exodus 3:6: "I am...the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob." If we read only the black and white letters, we will understand that God is the God of these three: the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. Even elementary students can read and understand that. But the Lord Jesus unveiled something of life and resurrection from this title of God! Since God is the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, and all three are dead, and since God is a God of the living and not of the dead, God must surely be the God of resurrection! By this the Lord Jesus also proved that all these dead saints will be resurrected. Such a spiritual revelation is contained in the black and white letters, but we cannot

see it simply by the letters; we need something more. We need a spirit of wisdom and revelation (Eph. 1:17).

In one sense, it is easy to read chapter 1 of Matthew. This is the genealogy of "Jesus Christ, the son of David, the son of Abraham." It is not difficult to understand that these were the forefathers of the Lord Jesus and that Mary was His mother. But what we need concerning this chapter is revelation! In order to know the kingdom we must know the seed of the kingdom. What is this seed? You may say that the seed is the Lord Jesus, but what is He? I do not ask *who* the Lord Jesus is but *what* He is. We need something far beyond a mere doctrinal answer. We need revelation to see that the Lord Jesus is the issue of so many human generations mingled with divinity. The One who came out of the mingling of so many human generations with the Triune God is called Jesus and Emmanuel (vv. 21, 23).

FORTY-TWO GENERATIONS OF HUMANITY

Forty-two generations are included in this genealogy. These are divided into three sections of fourteen each. The first section begins with Abraham and proceeds to David the man. The second section begins with David the king. So David is counted as two generations—one as a man to conclude the first section, and the second as a king to begin the second section. The third section includes the time of captivity to the birth of Jesus Christ. These forty-two generations are very meaningful.

The first section is the section of ordinary human beings. Abraham was an ordinary person, as was Jacob, and even the man David. The second section is the section of the kings, the royal generations. King David begat King Solomon, and King Solomon begat another king, and on in succession, one king begetting another. The third section includes all the generations of captivity and the returned ones. Had there been no return from captivity, it would have been impossible for the Lord Jesus to have been born of the holy race in the city of Bethlehem, for almost the entire holy race had been dispersed throughout the Gentile world. This return from captivity afforded the Lord Jesus the opportunity to come to earth the first time. The coming of the Lord Jesus was the issue of all these human generations: the generations of the ordinary human beings, the generations of the kings, and the generations of the captured and returned ones.

The Lord Jesus is wonderful! He was the issue of Abraham, the real Isaac. Isaac was, in figure, put to death and resurrected, and he married Rebekah, who was a type of the church as the bride. The Lord Jesus was also the issue of David, that is, Solomon, who had such wisdom and who built the temple of God.

To understand the first seventeen verses of the New Testament, we need a full revelation of the entire Old Testament, for they actually give us an abstract of the entire Old Testament in capsule form. If we would cover these seventeen verses, we would have to cover the things from Genesis to Malachi.

The Lord Jesus was such an issue—the issue of Abraham, the issue of David, and also the issue of a woman, a virgin. There was a promise given to Abraham regarding his issue (Gen. 22:18) and a promise given to David about his issue (2 Sam. 7:12-13). There was also a promise concerning the issue of the woman (Gen. 3:15). This seed of the woman would bruise the head of the serpent. Out of forty-two generations these are only three: the issue of Abraham—Isaac—who was put to death and resurrected and whose coming back was to receive the bride; the issue of David—Solomon—who had wisdom and who built the temple of God; and the issue of the woman—Christ—who bruised the head of Satan. The Lord Jesus was such an issue.

THE MINGLING OF THE TRIUNE GOD

The Lord Jesus was not born in a simple way but in a very meaningful way—as the issue of all kinds of human generations, from Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, through the kings, and then through the captured and returned ones. However, this is only one aspect of the Lord Jesus. Another aspect is the mingling with the Triune God. He was not only the issue of many generations of the human race, but He was also mingled with the Triune God. He was the issue of forty-one generations of humanity mingled with the Holy Father, the Holy Son, and the Holy Spirit. According to the revelation of the Bible, the Father is in the Son (John 14:11), the Son is the Spirit (2 Cor. 3:17), and the Spirit is the application of the Triune God to the mingled humanity (13:14). When we have the Lord Jesus, we have everything. In this One we have Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, Joseph, David, Solomon, and Mary. We also have the Holy Father, the Holy Son, and the Holy Spirit. He was the issue of forty-one human generations mingled with the Triune God. It will take eternity for us to

fully apprehend this matter. Only in eternity will we fully understand what the Lord Jesus is.

The Lord Jesus is not so low and so simple. He is much more than a Savior who had pity on poor sinners and saved them from hell. He is wonderful! We need to pray over chapter 1 of Matthew again in the light of all the history of the Old Testament. Then we will see what He is.

JESUS AND EMMANUEL

Jesus means "Jehovah-plus." Jesus is not only Jehovah; He is Jehovah-*plus*. In Hebrew the name of Jehovah is included in the name of Jesus. Jesus means Jehovah plus "the Savior," or plus "the salvation, the deliverance." Jesus is Jehovah plus the all-inclusive salvation. Emmanuel means God "with us," another *plus*. The Lord Jesus is not only God; He is God "with us." We would tell our Jewish friends that we are richer than they. We have what they have, but they do not have what we have. They have Jehovah, and they have God; but we have Jehovah plus "salvation" and God plus "with us." We would invite them to come and join us. They would have everything to gain and nothing to lose. We would never join them, because we have something richer, higher, better, and greater; this is the Lord Jesus. He, as the issue of all the human generations mingled with the Triune God, is Jehovah-plus and God-plus. From now on, surely you will have another taste when you call upon the name of the Lord Jesus. His name is so rich, so sweet, and He is rich to all who call upon His name (Rom. 10:12). Hallelujah for Jesus! Hallelujah for Jehovah-plus! Hallelujah for Emmanuel! Hallelujah for God-plus! Jehovah-plus and God-plus is the seed which has been sown into us.

AFTER TESTING, THE FULFILLMENT

Now we come to the meaning of the number forty-two. In the Bible we have the number forty and also the number forty-two. By the revelation of the Scriptures, we understand that the number forty means trials, sufferings, testings, and temptations. There are many forties in the Bible. For forty years the people of Israel were in the wilderness being tested and tried by God, with a great deal of suffering. When Moses was on the mount for forty days, that was a testing for the people of Israel (Exo. 24:18). There was a period of forty days and nights related to Elijah (1 Kings 19:8), and the Lord Jesus Himself was tempted for forty days (Matt. 4:1-2). Following His resurrection, the Lord

tested His disciples for forty days by doing nothing to vindicate Himself and nothing to prove to them that all authority in heaven and on the earth had been given to Him. If I had been Peter, I would not have had the patience to wait day after day, week after week, with nothing happening for thirty-nine days. Those forty days were a time of real testing. Clearly the number forty means testing, trials, temptations, and sufferings.

Forty-two, of course, is composed of forty plus two. Two is the number of witness, of testimony. Forty-two means that after the period of testing and trial something will be accomplished to fulfill God's purpose. Hallelujah! From the time of Abraham to the birth of Joseph's father was a period of forty generations, a period of testing. The promise of Abraham had not been fulfilled, nor the promise to David. Neither had the promises of so many good things to the children of Israel been fulfilled. These were generations of real testing.

However, after two more generations, the fulfillment was realized. The Lord Jesus came! He is God incarnated! He was not incarnated in the second generation of the human race, or the twentieth, or the fortieth. God did not count from Adam, the created race, but from the children of Abraham, the people of promise. There had been many promises, but God was not incarnated until the forty-second generation, the second generation after a long period of testing, trials, and even failures.

The record from Abraham to Malachi on the one hand is a record of all God's promises. On the other hand it is a record of testings, defeats, disappointments, and failures. Surely we would have given up. We would have said that God made promises to our forefather Abraham forty generations ago, but nothing has happened. But now, at the forty-second generation God Himself was incarnated. The forty-second generation is the Lord Jesus, the fulfillment of God's promises and God's purpose, even the fulfillment of everything that God intended to do. Forty plus two means the sufferings and testings plus the fulfillment of God's purpose. After forty-two generations everything pertaining to God's purpose is fulfilled.

In Revelation 12:6 there are forty-two months, or three and a half years. The end of those forty-two months will be the completion of the great tribulation. At that completion the Lord Jesus will come again, and that will be the fulfillment of God's purpose.

The forty-two generations in Matthew 1 are divided into three sections. Matthew 1:17 says that from Abraham to David is fourteen generations, from David the king to the captivity another fourteen generations, and from the captivity to the birth of Jesus Christ a third group of fourteen generations. The first fourteen generations are related mainly to God the Father; the second group, the kingly generations, are undoubtedly related to God the Son, who is the King; and the third group, which includes so many sufferings and experiences, is related to the Holy Spirit. Therefore, the Trinity is indicated in these forty-two generations, and the outcome, the issue, of all these generations is the Lord Jesus, the forty-second generation. He is the all-inclusive issue of these generations mingled with the Father, the Son, and the Spirit. So His name is Jehovah-plus and God-plus. To see this we need a spirit of wisdom and revelation. How wonderful our Lord Jesus is! Our human vocabulary is not adequate to describe Him. He is the issue of all the generations of the promised people mingled with the Triune God to be Jehovah-plus and God-plus.

THE ALL-INCLUSIVE SEED

This wonderful One is the seed. In this seed are death and resurrection. In this seed are the receiving of the bride, the wisdom, the building of the house of God, and the bruising of the serpent's head. In this seed are the passing through of all the tests, temptations, sufferings, and eventually the reaching of the goal. In this seed are the human element and the divine element, humanity and divinity. Abraham and Isaac are included, and so are David and Solomon. The Holy Father, the Holy Son, and the Holy Spirit are all included in the seed. This little seed is the all-inclusive wonderful One! What a Jesus is this very One in whom we believe. This Jesus, this wonderful One, is the seed of the kingdom. The New Testament is a book concerning the kingdom, and the first book presents the Lord Jesus as the seed. This seed is called Jehovah-plus and God-plus.

THE SEED BEING THE KING

Accepted by the Gentiles

Chapter 2 shows us that this seed of the kingdom is the King. The Lord Jesus was accepted by Gentiles who had no religion, no Bible knowledge, no religious forms, no doctrines, and no teachings (vv. 1-2). Such a simple people

accepted Him as a King. They did not know the Bible. It was to such a people—simple ones without any Bible knowledge or religious concepts and who did not even know how to worship and serve God—that Jesus, the wonderful person, was revealed. He was revealed to them and accepted by them.

Neglected by Religion

The Lord Jesus, on the contrary, was neglected by the religious people. The chief priests and scribes were in the highest position among the religious people. They had knowledge; they knew the Scriptures and even knew where Christ was to be born. Yet none of them cared for Him. When they heard the news of His birth, no one went to Bethlehem to see Him. They just discussed Micah 5:2. Because of their indifference, they neglected the Lord Jesus.

Many religious people today are the same. In many cases, after the religious ones talk about Jesus in their services, they go their own way—some go fishing; others gamble or pursue their worldly pleasures. When one of my college classmates became a Christian, he and others began to have communion in his home on Sunday evenings. After their so-called communion, they turned the table cover over and used the same table for a gambling game. Among today's Christians, many talk about the Lord Jesus, but very few care for Him. Their Jesus only belongs to the cathedral or the pulpit or the altar. When the religious service is over, the people do as they please. If you went into their wonderful cathedral to tell them what the Lord Jesus really is, they would be offended. They would say that you teach falsely because they never heard such teaching from their priests or pastors. Thus, Matthew 2 shows us the proper persons to accept the seed of the kingdom: not the religious ones with Bible knowledge but simple people who can receive the heavenly vision and to whom the heavenly star can appear.

Persecuted by Politics

Not only was this wonderful seed rejected by the religion, but He was also persecuted by politics. When King Herod learned of His birth, he was very troubled. He persecuted the Lord Jesus, destroying many young lives by his persecution (v. 16).

We must have revelation to understand the Bible. On the first page of the New Testament, we see what a wonderful One the Lord Jesus is as the seed of life for the kingdom. In the second chapter we are shown the proper persons to accept the Lord Jesus—not the religious people or the political people—but the ordinary, simple ones who have no Bible knowledge and no political ambition. If you have a dream of being influential in political circles, you are through as far as the Lord Jesus is concerned. Sooner or later you will persecute Him.

We must be simple people with a heavenly star. We may know nothing about the prophecy in Micah 5:2, but we do have the "heavenly star," the living guidance of the living One in us. This is wonderful! What shall we do? We simply offer our all to Him, and we take another way (Matt. 2:12). This means that we can never be the same. Anyone who will be simple and follow the heavenly star to accept the Lord Jesus will certainly take another way. After reading these pages, many of you will take another way. No longer will you be politicians or religious people. You will be simple people with a heavenly star, people who take another way. These are the kingdom people. These are the people who accept Christ. Christ is accepted only by such ones. In chapter 2 of Matthew we have three kinds of people: the simple heathen, the religious people, and the political leaders. Let us be those simple ones who can receive Christ!

THE LOWLY NAZARENE

Matthew 2 reveals that this wonderful One can only be accepted and received by the simple ones who have nothing to do with religion or politics. The religionists neglect Him; the politicians reject and persecute Him. However, the simple ones receive Him. Eventually, this wonderful person became a lowly Nazarene (v. 23). At the end of chapter 1, He is called Emmanuel; at the end of chapter 2, He is called a Nazarene, meaning He is little, despised, and without fame. Our Emmanuel is a Nazarene. To the world, to the politicians, and to the religious people, the Lord Jesus is a Nazarene. But to us, He is Jehovah-plus and God-plus.

CHAPTER FIVE

THE SOWING OF THE SEED OF THE KINGDOM

Scripture Reading: Matt. 3:1-2, 4, 7-12, 16-17; 4:1-2, 11, 12-22; Mark 4:26-29

What is the kingdom? The kingdom is the totality of Christ as life, spread into us with all His activities. The kingdom is not a totality of doctrines or any other things but of Christ as life, spread into us with all His activities. Do not forget Mark 4:26-29. In that parable the Lord Jesus likened the kingdom to a seed that is sown into the earth, grows, brings forth fruit, and eventually produces the harvest. The harvest signifies the full manifestation of the kingdom. Long before the harvest, the kingdom has already come as a seed. Strictly speaking, the coming of the kingdom began with the coming of the seed. The manifestation of the kingdom comes through a process of growth.

This is completely different from the concept of some Christian teachers who teach that the kingdom is suspended and will one day suddenly come down to earth. This concept is absolutely wrong. The kingdom comes as a seed that is sown into the earth, grows, and produces the harvest. The harvest is the full coming, the full manifestation, of the kingdom. The coming of the kingdom began when the Lord Jesus came as the seed nearly two thousand years ago, and it has been coming gradually through a process of growth ever since. Today we are still in the growth process of the kingdom, expecting the harvest to be ripened one day. When the harvest is ripe, that will be the day of the full manifestation of the kingdom. The harvest completes the coming of the kingdom.

This is not merely an interpretation of prophecy. This is the proper understanding of the pure Word. Mark is not the only book that gives us such a parable. If you collect verses from other books of the New Testament, you will see that these verses fit together like the pieces of a jigsaw puzzle to give us a full picture of Christ, that wonderful person, who came as the seed nearly two thousand years ago. Christ not only came as the seed of the kingdom, but He came also as the Sower of the kingdom, sowing Himself into the human earth. At that time the kingdom began to come. After this wonderful seed has been sown into us, it begins to grow. Let us water it that it may grow and grow.

Today the seed is still growing. This growth is simply the process of His gradual coming. This process is the gradual coming of the kingdom, until one day the growth will bring forth the harvest. That will be the completion of the coming of the kingdom. The harvest will be the full manifestation of the kingdom.

I am very happy that we have heard the proper tidings of the kingdom. This matter of the kingdom has been hidden, covered, and veiled for centuries. But by the Lord's mercy and grace the veil has been taken away. The kingdom has never been so open and so transparently clear as it is to us today. The kingdom is the totality of Christ as life, spread into us with all His activities. The coming of the kingdom began when Christ came to sow Himself into the human earth so that He might grow, mature, and bring forth the harvest, which is the full manifestation of the kingdom. The kingdom has come! Now the kingdom is growing and is coming through this growth process. We all have the seed, and we all are in the growing process. One day we will be in the harvest. We have the Lord Jesus, the wonderful seed. Have you ever realized that He is so much to us? He is the issue of so many human generations mingled with the Triune God. He is Jehovah-plus and God-plus! Such a wonderful One is the seed.

In chapter 1 of Matthew, we have the presentation of the seed. In chapter 2 we have the proper people to receive the seed. Now, beginning with chapter 3, we are shown how this seed of the kingdom will be sown. First, Matthew 3 tells us that the sowing of the Lord Jesus as the seed has nothing to do with culture or religion. In the book *Christ versus Religion,* we pointed out that the forerunner of the Lord Jesus, John the Baptist, came forth without any culture or religion. During that time the Jewish people had the highest culture with their Hebrew religion. John the Baptist was born into the highest religion and culture. However, when John appeared, he went outside religion and culture. The religious center was in Jerusalem with the temple and the altar, but John did not go there. Although he was born into a priestly home, he went out from the temple, out from the holy city. He went into the wilderness, far away from human culture and religion. He wore camel's hair, something wild and dirty. According to Leviticus 11:4, a camel was an unclean animal. Not only did John wear camel's hair; he also had locusts and wild honey for his food (Matt. 3:4). Everything related to John was without religion and without culture.

John the Baptist preached in a peculiar way: “Repent, for the kingdom” (v. 2). He also had a strange practice. If you accepted his preaching, he would not teach you. He simply put you into the water, meaning that he buried you and terminated you. John, in effect, said, “You must be terminated! You must be buried! Do you repent for the kingdom? Then I will terminate you. I will put you to death. You must realize that you are not good for anything. You are only good for burial!” On the negative side, John buried people in the waters of baptism (vv. 5-6).

On the positive side, he said that One was coming who would baptize them in the Holy Spirit. John terminated people, but the coming One would give them a new beginning. What is this new beginning? When the Pharisees and Sadducees came to John, they perhaps had the concept that they needed to improve and that this strange person could do something to improve them. Listen to what John said to them. John did not say, “You Pharisees and Sadducees are all gentlemen, but you are not gentle enough. I am here to improve you and make you more gentle.” Instead, John said, “Offspring of vipers, who prompted you to flee from the coming wrath?” (v. 7). In other words, “Don’t think about being good or bad. You are vipers, poisonous serpents, a generation of vipers. To change your conduct means nothing. If you polish yourselves, you are still vipers. If you improve yourselves, you become improved vipers. You don’t need a change in your outward conduct; you need a change in birth. You need a change of life, a change of your nature.”

John told the Pharisees and the Sadducees not to presume (v. 9). He said, “Do not presume” because they were thinking, “We are the sons of Abraham. Our great forefather was Abraham.” This simply means that they were exercising their mentality based on the old tradition. Abraham was an old tradition to them. For Jews not to think about Abraham was very difficult. John knew that the Pharisees and Sadducees were in their mentality, thinking about Abraham. Therefore, John said, “Do not presume. Stop thinking and repent. Repent from your thinking. Do not presume that you have Abraham as your father. God is able to raise children up out of lifeless stones. God is able to put His life into these stones and raise up children of Abraham.” How could God make stones into children to inherit the promise that was given to Abraham? There was only one way—the way of life.

Then John seemed to continue: "You vipers come to me pretending. You may fool me, but you can never deceive Him. I am putting you into the water. If you are honest and mean business to repent for the kingdom, the One coming after me will put you into the Holy Spirit so that you may have new life. If you are dishonest, He has another way to deal with you. He will put you into the fire and burn you up!" (vv. 10-11).

Many Christians quote Matthew 3:11 about being baptized in the Holy Spirit and fire, thinking that the fire is something positive. If you read verses 10, 11, and 12 carefully, you will see that each verse ends with the word *fire*. Verse 10 says that the axe is laid at the root of the trees, and every tree that does not produce good fruit is cut down and cast into the fire. Is fire something positive here? Certainly not! In verse 11 John said, "I baptize you in water unto repentance, but He who is coming after me is stronger than I...He Himself will baptize you in the Holy Spirit and fire." Whether it is in the Holy Spirit or in fire depends on you. In the following verse John said that the coming One has the winnowing fan in His hand and that He will thoroughly cleanse His threshing floor. If you are grains of wheat, you will surely be gathered into the barn, being the ones whom He will put into the Holy Spirit. But if you are chaff, He will put you into the fire. This is the correct meaning of *fire* in these verses. In all three verses *fire* is used in a negative sense. The Lord Jesus has the power to put you either into the Holy Spirit or into the fire.

THE BAPTISM OF THE LORD JESUS

When the Lord Jesus was baptized, the Holy Spirit came down upon Him in the form of a dove. He was conceived of the Holy Spirit (Luke 1:31, 35; Matt. 1:20), and the Holy Spirit was mingled with His human nature within. When the Lord Jesus came to be baptized, He was already a man whose human element was mingled with divinity. Since He was mingled with the Spirit already, how could the Spirit as a complete unit descend upon Him? Are there two Holy Spirits? Did not the Lord Jesus have the Holy Spirit already? Although He had been conceived of the Holy Spirit, the Holy Spirit nevertheless came down from the heavens as a complete unit and descended upon Him. The Lord Jesus is wonderful! He was already mingled with the Holy Spirit, yet the Holy Spirit still came down upon Him.

John said, "He Himself will baptize you in the Holy Spirit" (3:11). This raises a problem. How does He baptize us? When does He baptize us? If we

could gather together all the Christian teachers from the first century to the present, they would fight until eternity about this one thing. No one can systematize it; no one can make it clear. Nevertheless, I do know that the Lord Jesus baptized Peter, I know that He baptized me, and I know that He baptized you into the Holy Spirit. How He did it no one can adequately explain. Psalm 139 indicates that we do not even know how we were formed and created by God. Yet we do know that God created us. It is hard for you to tell me how God created you. Although you may not know how you were created, you do know that you were created because you are here. Likewise, I do not really know how the Lord Jesus baptized me, but I do know that I have been baptized by Him because I am so excited about Him. If I had never been baptized by Christ, I could not be so excited about Him. We have been baptized. How we do not know, but He has baptized us in the Holy Spirit. Do not try to analyze. Analysis only damages. In the Bible there is no such thing as systematic theology. We do know that we have been baptized in the Spirit and that we are here with the seed inside of us. The Lord Jesus has been sown into us in a way that is without culture and without religion.

THE VICTORIOUS SEED

Now we come to Matthew 4. The Lord Jesus is the seed of the kingdom to be sown into us, but before He could be sown into us, He first had to pass the test. He had to defeat the enemy. So He went to the wilderness to meet the enemy and was victorious. The leader of the demons was defeated. The devil was defeated, not by God but by a man, Jesus the Nazarene. The enemy tempted the Lord Jesus not to stand on the position of a man, saying, “If You are the Son of God, speak that these stones may become loaves of bread” (v. 3). He answered, “Man shall not live on bread alone” (v. 4). He stood as a man and defeated the enemy.

A GREAT LIGHT

After defeating the enemy, the Lord Jesus went to Galilee of the Gentiles (vv. 12-17). If we had no record in the Bible, we could never realize that His going to Galilee was the shining of a great light. He went there to shine upon all the people sitting in darkness. It was not simply an outward preaching; it was a shining. Why did those young fishermen follow the Lord Jesus when all He said to them was, “Come after Me” (vv. 18-22)? He did not preach very much. To Peter and Andrew He said, “Come after Me,” and they followed Him.

The Lord Jesus, the Nazarene, told people to follow Him, and they did. Peter and Andrew left the boat and the sea; James and John left the net and their father. Why would people leave everything and follow Him? As a great light He shined upon them. When the Lord Jesus came to that fishing wharf, He shined upon those young fishermen, and they followed Him. Many of us have experienced the same thing. I can testify that I experienced the shining of the Lord Jesus as a great light. In a sense, He has shined upon all of us. Even today we are still under His shining. We can never get away from Him; the shining binds us to Him.

The apostle Paul, when he was Saul of Tarsus, persecuted the church. On his way to Damascus, the Lord Jesus shined upon him from the heavens (Acts 9:3-5). Saul said, "Who are You, Lord?" The Lord Jesus said, "I am Jesus, whom you persecute." Paul experienced the shining of the Lord Jesus, and he was blinded by it. We have all been blinded and attracted by the shining of the Lord Jesus.

When the Lord Jesus came to shine over the ones sitting in darkness, only the young people were caught. James and John, the sons of Zebedee, were mending their nets with their father. Only the two sons followed Him; the father did not. All the ones He called were young people. If you are not preoccupied, you are young. When the Lord was born, two old seekers of God, Simeon and Anna, were in the temple. They did love the Lord. However, the Lord Jesus did not go to the temple and call them. He went to the seashore and called the young people. In any country a fishing wharf is a dirty place where many low-class people may be found. Yet the Lord Jesus went to the fishing wharf to find the young fishermen. The Lord Jesus shined upon these young, uneducated fishermen and said to them, "Come after Me." They left everything and followed Him. The young ones, the wild ones, the backward ones, the uneducated ones, the dirty ones—these followed the Lord Jesus.

The young people are the right persons for the Lord's move today—not only in the U.S.A. but also in Europe, in Africa, and in the whole world. Perhaps Simeon and Anna had died by the time the Lord Jesus came out to minister. Nevertheless, the Lord Jesus did not go to the temple and call the old people to follow Him. Rather, He went to the fishing wharf to find some young fishermen who were not preoccupied. They were dirty, and they were empty, but they were not preoccupied. To be preoccupied is to be old. They were without religion, without Bible knowledge, and with only a poor background

of fishing, but the Lord Jesus called them to follow Him. The principle is the same today. We all need to be young and unoccupied. The Lord will never use any old, preoccupied people for His move upon the earth. We all should be the young fishermen, not young preachers or young priests or young Pharisees but young fishermen who are so simple, so empty, and so unoccupied. These are the right persons for the Lord's kingdom.

CHAPTER SIX

THE GROWING OF THE SEED OF THE KINGDOM

Scripture Reading: Matt. 5:1-3, 8, 10, 20, 45a, 48; 6:10, 33; 7:16-18, 21-23; 19:7-8, 10; 1 Pet. 3:4

In chapter 4 of Matthew a group of people were attracted to the Lord Jesus, and in chapter 5 He brought them to a high mountain (v. 1). They had been following Him, but He still needed to get inside of them. The fact that He brought them to a high mountain is very meaningful. When we have important matters to consider, it is sometimes good to get away from everything, to go up to a mountain, where the level is higher. This is what the Lord did with His disciples. There on the high mountain, He showed them the way He could get into them.

THE SOWING FOR THE SPREADING

To sow a seed into the earth is easy because the earth has no will of its own. It has no desires, no concepts, no thoughts, and no ideas. Because the earth is lifeless, it is easy to sow a seed into it. However, it is not easy for the Lord Jesus to sow Himself into us because we are not simple; in fact, we are very complicated, with two main problems. The first problem involves our spirit, the deepest part of our being. The second problem concerns our heart, which surrounds our spirit. If we read the New Testament carefully, putting the pieces together like a jigsaw puzzle to give us a clear picture, we will see that the heart surrounds the spirit. The spirit is at the center of the heart. Our heart is complicated, being composed of the mind—the thinking organ, the emotions—the loving organ, the will—the deciding organ, and the conscience. Our spirit hidden within our heart is even called “the hidden man of the heart” (1 Pet. 3:4). For Christ to sow Himself into our being, He must first get into our spirit and from there spread Himself into every part of our heart. In this way He will take full possession of our being. Not only will He sow Himself into our spirit, but He will grow into our inward parts—our mind, will, emotion, and conscience. Then our whole inward being will be filled with Christ.

POOR IN SPIRIT

The Lord Jesus told us clearly that we need to be poor in spirit in order to follow Him and to allow Him to sow Himself into us (Matt. 5:3). To be poor in spirit simply means to be empty in spirit—to have no preoccupations of any kind in our spirit. When the Lord Jesus came to the Jewish people, their spirits were filled with many other things. They had the holy Word, the temple, the altar, the holy rituals and forms, and the holy priesthood to care for the service to God. Because of their association with these religious things, they thought they knew God. They felt they had been trained from their forefathers to know God, and they had inherited many traditions that were precious to them. When the Lord Jesus came to them, their spirits were filled with all the doctrines and traditions of Judaism. All the things they treasured had filled them up so that nothing of the Lord Jesus could get into them.

Likewise, a great many Christians today have their spirits filled and preoccupied. Although they may not know what the human spirit is, or even that they have a spirit, nevertheless their spirit is preoccupied. Today's Christians have both the Old and the New Testaments. Many know something about Genesis, Exodus, Psalms, Matthew, John, and Acts. They know something about justification by faith in Romans and the ten horns in Revelation. They know the Bible in the way of letters, but they have little revelation of the spiritual significance because they are filled up in their spirit. Because they are already full, nothing more of the Lord Jesus can get into them; they are not poor in spirit.

To receive the Lord Jesus as the seed, we must be poor, empty, and unoccupied in our spirit. Of course, to be poor in spirit does not mean that we have a poor or weak spirit. We all need to pray, "Lord, have mercy that I may be empty in my spirit. Lord, I do want to be poor in spirit. Sweep away all the worthless things in order that I may be unoccupied and empty, ready for You to come in."

PURE IN HEART

In addition to the problem involving our spirit, there is a further problem with our heart. The Lord Jesus said, "Blessed are the pure in heart, for they shall see God" (v. 8). Purity of heart is a matter of motive. We should not have any goal other than God Himself. To be pure in heart is to seek only God. Our

desires, our thoughts, and our decisions must be to seek only God Himself. We all need to pray, “Lord, grant me a pure heart. Purify my motives until I have a single goal, and my whole being is completely zeroed in on You.” We should care for nothing else, and we should seek nothing else. We should not care only for peace, for joy, for physical blessings, or for spiritual blessings, and we should not seek those things. Our heart should be set upon God. God is our goal, and He is our motive. May the Lord deal with our hearts until they are single and simplified and are absolutely zeroed in on God Himself to such an extent that we seek nothing else.

If you want to receive Christ, you need to pray, “Lord, make me poor in my spirit and pure in my heart. Lord, empty my spirit and purify my heart. Grant me a single heart for You.” If our spirit and heart are prepared in such a way, we are ready for Him to come in. Immediately, the Lord Jesus will come into us. First, He will come into our spirit, and then He will begin to spread Himself from our spirit into our heart. Not only does He come into us as the seed of the kingdom, but He also grows within us. As He grows, He spreads and increases within us all the time. This is the growing of the kingdom, and this is the gradual coming of the kingdom.

THE GROWING OF CHRIST WITHIN US BEING THE COMING OF THE KINGDOM

Many Christians have prayed the words *Your kingdom come* (6:10). Although we may have repeated the words *Your kingdom come* many times, the kingdom has not come because we are not poor in our spirit to receive Christ, nor are we pure in our heart toward God. No matter how many times you repeat this prayer, nothing will happen unless you are poor in spirit and pure in heart. If you pray, “Lord, Your kingdom come,” the Lord will ask, “How about your spirit? How about your heart?” He is not coming in an external way but in an internal way. He is not coming from the heavens but out from within your spirit and your heart.

In order to have the coming of the kingdom, Christ must be growing within us all the time. The growing of Christ within us is the coming of the kingdom. It is good to pray, “Your kingdom come,” but it is more practical to pray, “Lord, grow within me.” “Your kingdom come” may be no more than a religious formula. Although this prayer has been repeated by millions of Christians for more than nineteen hundred years, still the kingdom has not

come. It is not difficult for the Lord to answer that prayer, but it is difficult for us to allow Him to grow within us. The coming of the kingdom is the growing of Christ within us. By being poor in our spirit and pure in our heart, we can give the Lord the ground to grow within us, and this growth will be the real coming of the kingdom. The more quickly we allow Him to grow in us, the more we hasten the coming of the kingdom.

RIGHT ACCORDING TO GOD AND UNDER GOD'S RULING

In chapters 5 through 7 of Matthew, we see that the kingdom is a matter of righteousness. Righteousness means to be right, and to be right means to be under God's ruling. Even to suffer for the sake of righteousness is a matter of the kingdom. "Blessed are those who are persecuted for the sake of righteousness, for theirs is the kingdom of the heavens" (5:10).

When the Lord Jesus returns, many Christians will say to Him in that day, "Lord, Lord, was it not in Your name that we prophesied, and in Your name cast out demons, and in Your name did many works of power?" The Lord Jesus will not deny this; He will admit that they did these things. Nevertheless, He will say, "Depart from Me, you workers of lawlessness" (7:22-23).

The proper translation in verse 23 is "lawlessness," not "iniquity." Iniquity is something dark, sinful, and abominable in the eyes of God, but lawlessness is somewhat different. A good illustration is that the law requires us to drive an automobile within the white lines of the highway. To drive outside the white lines is lawlessness, but it is not iniquity or immorality. Such driving is not right; it is careless and lawless.

When the Lord Jesus tells the lawless ones to depart from Him, He will tell them that He never allowed them to do the things they did in His name. The phrase *I never knew you* (v. 23) may be translated, "I never allowed you." The same word is translated in Romans 7:15: "That which I do, I allow not" (KJV). Paul knew what he was doing, but he did not allow himself to do it; he did not approve of it. Therefore, in effect, the Lord said that they prophesied in His name, cast out demons in His name, and performed miracles in His name, but He never allowed them to do it. They did all those things lawlessly. Whatever they did was lawlessness. They should have done the will of the Father. To be right is not related to being good or bad, right or wrong, in a human sense. To be right is related to doing the will of God in the eyes of God.

If we are driving on the freeway according to our own concept, a patrolman would not regard our good intention. If we are lawless, we will receive a traffic ticket. Being right according to our best intention does not mean that we are right according to the will of God.

Righteousness is to be right according to God's will, and there is a blessedness in suffering for the sake of righteousness (Matt. 5:10). Today we are suffering for the sake of the Lord's recovery. We are suffering criticism and condemnation, with the spreading of rumors and evil reports. These sufferings come because we are driving our car within the heavenly lines, and we cannot get out of these lines. Some Christians insist on having divisions, but the line is drawn very clearly in the Bible that there should be no divisions. To others this may seem narrow or exclusive, but we must stay within the heavenly lines. Many of the missionaries who labored in China would not give a good report about us simply because we stood for the oneness of the Body. They had come to build up their denomination, and when we could not be persuaded to cooperate with them, they felt that we were against foreigners. Actually, we were only against divisions.

Righteousness means to be right according to God's will. To be right in the eyes of God is to be poor in spirit, pure in heart, and right in all that we do. We should be right in all our behavior and activities, not according to human concepts, or according to our intentions, tastes, and desires, but according to God's will. This is the reality of the kingdom, and this is Christ. The Lord Jesus has come into me, and He is now expressing Himself through me. He has come in, and now He is coming out of me to express Himself. This is Christ spreading to be the kingdom.

The righteousness of the kingdom of the heavens is an exceeding righteousness, one that exceeds the righteousness of all others and that exceeds the righteousness of the law (v. 20). If you want to divorce your wife, to fulfill the requirement of the law of righteousness according to the law of Moses, you simply give her a certificate of divorce and divorce her (19:7). But the Lord Jesus said, "From the beginning it has not been so" (v. 8). According to God, it has not been so. According to God, it was one husband with one wife and one wife for one husband. The disciples considered that this was hard, even that it might be better not to be married (v. 10). The Lord Jesus agreed that it was difficult because they had to be right according to God

Himself, not right only according to the law of Moses. By taking them back to the beginning, He took them back to God Himself.

To be right according to God means that you are willing to turn the other cheek; if someone smites you on one cheek, you should be willing for him to smite you on the other cheek also. If someone forces you to walk one mile with him, you should volunteer to go two miles. In our natural life none of us can measure up to this standard of righteousness, of being right according to God.

NEEDING GOD'S LIFE

Eventually, the Lord Jesus said, "You therefore shall be perfect as your heavenly Father is perfect" (5:48). He did not say that we should be perfect as a gentleman but perfect as our heavenly Father. How is this possible? It is impossible unless we have the Father's life. If someone asked us to be perfect as a little lamb that is meek and gentle, we would have to say that it is impossible, because we do not have a lamb's life. In order to be perfect as a lamb, we would need the life of a lamb. Then being meek and gentle would be no problem. In the same way, it is impossible for us to be perfect as our heavenly Father is perfect unless we have His life.

EXPRESSION ACCORDING TO LIFE

In Matthew 7:16 the Lord Jesus asked, "Do men gather grapes from thorns, or figs from thistles?" Do you consider yourselves thorns or grapes? Are you figs or thistles? We must admit that in ourselves we are not grapes or figs; we are thorns and thistles. We are all hopeless cases. Because we are thorns, we can never produce grapes. Because we are thistles, we can never bring forth figs. In ourselves we are hopeless, but in Christ we are full of hope. The life of Christ is a grape-producing life and also a fig-producing life. This grape-producing life and fig-producing life has come into us! When this life gets into us, the grapes and the figs will come out as the expression of life.

We need to pray for the Lord's mercy that we may be poor in spirit, pure in heart, right in all that we do, and right according to God's will. If we pray in this way, the Lord Jesus will take us over little by little, and He will fill us up part by part. He will grow in us, and He will increase within us all the time. Eventually, we will no longer produce thorns and thistles, but we will produce

grapes and figs, which are simply two different expressions of the kingdom life. Both grapes and figs are used for feeding others.

This is the kingdom life. This is not outward conduct; it is the expression of the inward life, which is Christ spreading within our being. If He is to spread into all our inward being, we need to be poor in our spirit, pure in our heart, and right in all that we do, not according to our concepts but according to God Himself. This is the way for Christ to sow Himself into us and to spread Himself into our being so that we may have a corporate life. This corporate life is the kingdom. This is the reality of the church life. Christ as life is spreading Himself into us. Now we can see in a fuller way that the kingdom is the totality of Christ as life spreading into us with all His activities.

CHAPTER SEVEN

IMAGE AND DOMINION

Scripture Reading: Gen. 1:26; 2:9; 3:1, 18a; 1 John 3:9-10a; John 8:44; Matt. 23:33; 12:34; 3:7, 9; 7:16; 5:9, 45a, 48, 13a, 14a, 16; Rev. 22:1-2

In Genesis 1:26 we are told that God created man with two main aspects. First, man was created in God's image. This word *image* is an important word in the Bible. To say that man was created in the image of God means that man was created according to God. The image of God is Christ (2 Cor. 4:4). Therefore, man was created according to Christ. Second, God committed His dominion to man. God gave man dominion over the fish of the sea, over the birds of heaven, and over all the earth. *Dominion* refers to the kingdom. It is the divine kingdom. Image and dominion are the two main aspects of God's creation of man. Image is for the expression of God, and dominion is for the authority of God. Man was created to express and to represent God. To express God requires God's image; to represent God requires God's authority.

ONLY BY GOD'S LIFE

We must realize that these matters of image and dominion can never be accomplished without God's life. Simply to have the outward form of God's image and authority is insufficient. If man is to express God and represent God, he needs God's life. Without God's life we are utterly unable and unqualified to express Him and represent Him. We need the life of God. Therefore, immediately Genesis 2:9 mentions the matter of life. After God had created man in His image and had committed to him His authority, He placed man before the tree of life, indicating that man must receive God as life in the form of food. God presented Himself to man in the form of food. After creating man, God presented Himself to man as food so that man could take Him in. Eating is the best way, even the unique way, of taking something into us. At the beginning, God wanted man to take Him in. If God could get into man and become man's life, man could spontaneously express God. As a result of expressing God, man would also be qualified to represent God. If we are able to express someone, we are also able to represent him. Representation comes from expression. The man who expresses God is

qualified to represent God. This was God's intention for man from the beginning.

ANOTHER SOURCE—THE SERPENT

However, Genesis 2:9 also reveals a source other than God—the evil one, Satan, the adversary of God. The tree of the knowledge of good and evil has its source in Satan. In Genesis 1 the significant words are *image* and *dominion*. In Genesis 2 the significant word is *life*, the tree of life. God's image and dominion require God's life. These three—image, dominion, and life—are very positive. In Genesis 3 there is another important but very negative word—the serpent. After two positive chapters, suddenly *the serpent* comes in.

When the Lord Jesus rebuked the Pharisees and scribes, calling them serpents and a brood of vipers (Matt. 23:33; 12:34), He did not speak in a light way. He was saying that Satan was a serpent, and they were all the offspring of the serpent; Satan was the father, and they were all his children. Their father was the serpent; therefore, they belonged to the serpent family. In John 8:44 the Lord Jesus also told the Pharisees that their father was the devil. The Pharisees claimed that Abraham was their father, but the Lord Jesus said that if Abraham were their father, they would have done the works of Abraham. He told them that their father was not Abraham but the serpent, the devil, the father of lies.

The serpent came into man first by tempting him to take his thought. God had told Adam and Eve not to eat of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil lest they die (Gen. 2:17). But the serpent came in to raise a question: "Did God really say?" If you look at a question mark, you will see that it resembles a serpent. When that little serpent rears up his head and questions you, he looks like a question mark. The satanic, serpentine thought first entered the human mind. Second, the man stretched forth his hand and ate of the tree of knowledge. In this way the serpent, the evil one, entered the human race. First, Satan entered man's mind; second, he came into man's physical body. Because of this, the human mentality is awful. Man's mind is evil and terrible because it has been fully occupied by the evil serpent. Also, the human body has been corrupted with all kinds of lusts. The Bible tells us that the lusts are in man's physical body (Gal. 5:24; James 4:1). Man's body has become flesh. It was created by God as a body, but after it was poisoned and corrupted by Satan, it became flesh. The created body was good, clean, and pure; the flesh

is evil, dirty, corrupt, and full of lusts. Satan came into man. Therefore, man now has a defiled body and a corrupted mind.

When Satan came into man, man not only became sinful, but his inward constitution was also corrupted with the satanic element. Both the outward conduct and the inward nature were defiled. We need many negative words to describe this corrupted man. All that man is and does is corrupt. Whether he loves or hates, man is full of the poisonous element of Satan. Man has been inwardly constituted with Satan and has become a satanic thing. Man has been mixed with Satan. He is still man, but man mixed with Satan. Man was mixed with Satan to such an extent that the Lord Jesus called the Pharisees serpents (Matt. 23:33). Apparently, human beings are still men. They appear to be ladies and gentlemen as they walk down the street. Actually, in the eyes of God, they are serpents. This is not a matter of outward conduct; it is absolutely a matter of the inward element, the inward nature.

John 3:14 shows us that the bronze serpent in the wilderness was a type of Christ. Moses made a serpent of bronze and put it on a pole so that the people who were poisoned by the fiery serpents might be saved (Num. 21:9). The bronze serpent on the pole typified the Lord Jesus on the cross. When He was on the cross, He was in the form of a serpent. In like manner, the bronze serpent had only the form of a serpent; it did not have the nature or the poison of a serpent. On the cross the Lord Jesus took the form of the serpent because He died for man who had become a serpent in his inward nature. In the eyes of God, mankind had become serpents. Apparently, man was still man; actually, he was a serpent. Therefore, when the Lord Jesus died as the substitute for all the serpentine people, He was in the form of the serpent.

THORNS AND THISTLES

Genesis 3:18 mentions two other negative words—*thorns* and *thistles.* The Lord Jesus asked, “Do men gather grapes from thorns, or figs from thistles?” (Matt. 7:16). Thorns and thistles came from the fall. They did not exist before the fall. In God’s creation there were no thorns and thistles. For the ground to grow thorns and thistles after the fall indicates that in the eyes of God all the children of Adam have become thorns and thistles. Whether you are the manager of a bank or the robber of a bank, a gambler in a casino or a preacher in a cathedral, your nature in the eyes of God consists of thorns and thistles. Just as the Lord Jesus did not call the Pharisees serpents in a light way, He

also did not use the words *thorns* and *thistles* in a meaningless way. When Jesus used the term *serpent,* He certainly had the serpent of Genesis 3 in mind. Likewise, when He used the words *thorns* and *thistles,* He was also referring to Genesis 3.

The Bible tells us that the grape tree, the vine tree, is the Lord Jesus (John 15). When we were regenerated, we became the branches of this vine tree. In Adam we were thorns and thistles; in Christ we are branches of the real vine.

God created man in His image and gave him His authority so that man could express Him and represent Him. Instead, however, Satan entered into man, usurped him, and possessed man's life. Satan even saturated man's body with his poisonous element, making it the flesh. Although the Lord drew a line to preserve man's spirit, Satan has corrupted man's mind and possessed man's body. The result is that man has become a serpentine being and also thorns and thistles.

THE KINGDOM OF SATAN

A kingdom is the totality of a certain life. If there is no life, there is no kingdom. For example, without the vegetable life it is impossible to have the vegetable kingdom. We do not speak of the chair kingdom, the stone kingdom, or the brick kingdom, because these things have no life. If a certain life exists, that life with its activities constitutes a kingdom. The human life constitutes the human kingdom, the vegetable life constitutes the vegetable kingdom, and the animal life, the animal kingdom. If there is life, there is a kingdom. Satan has the satanic life. When this satanic life comes into man, it becomes the satanic kingdom.

The kingdom is an outgrowth of the family. There must be plant and animal families before there can be plant and animal kingdoms. There cannot be a kingdom without families. First, there are individuals; then the individuals are formed into families. When the families are put together collectively, they become a kingdom.

After Satan came into man, man became Satan's family with Satan as the father. In John 8:44 the Lord Jesus told the religious leaders that Satan was their father. First John 3:10 says that some people are the children of the devil. Satan is the father, and these people are his children. The family begins with

the father. When the family is enlarged, it becomes a kingdom. The satanic kingdom comes from the satanic family, and the satanic family comes from the satanic life. Have you ever considered that the fallen human race has become Satan's family? Satan is a father, and all the fallen human beings are his children. Satan generated a family, and this family has been formed into a kingdom.

This is altogether a matter of life. To be a part of the kingdom of Satan requires the life of Satan. If you did not have the devil's life, you could never be a child of the devil. Do not think it is easy to be a child of the devil. Most Christians today simply neglect the matter of life. If you rob a bank, you need a bank robber's life. If you do not have the robbing life, you can never rob. Can you teach or force a bird to bark? Regardless of how much a bird may try to bark, it cannot because it does not have the barking life. The same is true about lying. To lie you need the lying life. It is impossible to lie without the lying life. Chairs cannot lie, because they have no life. However, it is easy for human beings to lie because they have the lying life. Parents do not teach their children to lie. On the contrary, they charge them not to tell lies. Nevertheless, they still lie. They do not have to be taught to lie, because they have the lying life. Where did this lying life come from? It came from Satan, the father of lies. All men speak lies because they have Satan's life.

We were initially Satan's family, and eventually we became his kingdom. I have used this illustration to convince you further that the kingdom is not merely a dispensation or a sphere. It is the totality of a certain life. The kingdom of God is simply the totality of God's life.

TWO KINDS OF CHILDREN

In this universe there are actually two fathers: God, the Holy Father, and Satan, the evil father. Therefore, among the human race there are only two kinds of children: God the Father's children and Satan's children. First John 3:10 declares we are either children of God or children of Satan. In the past when I spoke on this matter—that fallen human beings possess the life of Satan—some said that I should not say this. I referred them to 1 John 3:10, where it says, "The children of the devil." Do you not think the children of the devil have the devil's life? How can you say that you are a child of your father and yet not have your father's life? If that is the case, you must be an adopted

son. Satan, however, has never adopted anyone. All the sons of Satan were born of him.

What kind of life do you have now? Today you have three lives: the natural, created life, the satanic life, and the divine life. We cannot deny that we have Satan's life. Have you not lost your temper recently? That was not an expression of the created life but of the satanic life. I am sure the natural life created by God will never lose its temper. Although the created, human life has no temper, it is very easy for us to lose our temper. This comes from the life of Satan within us. It is difficult to be patient; we must work at it. On the contrary, it is easy to lose our temper; it is spontaneous, requiring no deliberate exercise. It is easy because we have the satanic life.

Because we have three lives, we are quite complicated. When we were created in Adam, we had only one life—the human life. We all were in the garden of Eden in Adam. At that time we had only the human life—a life that was innocent, pure, and simple. This life had no temper and no hatred. It was simply the human life, and God called it very good (Gen. 1:31). At the time of the fall in Genesis 3, we were injected with another life—Satan's life. That life produced thorns and thistles. Therefore, after the fall we have the human life and the satanic life. Every human being has these two lives. All the unbelievers have the human life and the satanic life. Sometimes you can see the human life in a person. At other times you can see the satanic life in that same person. Perhaps in the morning a husband is a gentleman. However, when he returns home from work in the evening, he may have the face of a "devil-man."

We Christians are even more complicated than this, for when we received the Lord Jesus, we received a third life—the divine life. We have the human life, the satanic life, and the divine life. Because we have the human life, we can be a man. Because we have the satanic life, we can be a devil-man. Because we have the divine life, we can be a God-man. The same person may be a gentleman in the morning, a devil-man in the evening, and a God-man in the meeting.

Since we have the human life, we are in the human kingdom. Since we have the satanic life, we are also in the satanic kingdom. Since we have the life of God, we are in the kingdom of God. Whenever I come to a church meeting, I

see the kingdom of God. We are in the kingdom of God because we have the life of God. A kingdom is the totality of a certain life.

A MATTER OF LIFE

In the last chapter of the Bible there is a throne (Rev. 22:1). This throne is for the kingdom. Out of the throne proceeds the water of life, and in the water of life grows the tree of life with fruit to feed and leaves to heal. This is a matter of the kingdom. The kingdom is altogether a matter of life. In Genesis 1 and 2 the image of God and the dominion of God required the life of God. In Revelation 22 life proceeds out of the throne of God to produce the kingdom, which expresses God and represents Him. Look at the New Jerusalem. God's image and dominion can be seen there. Revelation 21 and 22 are the fulfillment of God's intention shown in Genesis 1 and 2. The kingdom is a totality of life, and life comes out of the throne to produce the kingdom. The essential matter is this—the kingdom is altogether a matter of life. Without life there is no kingdom. If there is life, there will surely be the kingdom.

CHILDREN, LIGHT, AND SALT

We are the children of God because we have the life of God. To God we are children. To the earth we are the salt (Matt. 5:13). To the world we are the light (v. 14). Salt kills germs and removes all the corruption. Light swallows up darkness. As God's kingdom and God's children, we are the salt that kills the corruption of the earth, and we are the light that swallows up the darkness of the world. This is the function of the kingdom of God. As salt, we will eventually heal the earth. The tree of life produces leaves, and these leaves heal the nations (Rev. 22:2). This is salting. We are the salt to the earth, and we are the light that swallows up all the darkness. Wherever the kingdom of God goes today, corruption will be killed, and darkness will be swallowed up. However, this is a corporate, not an individual, matter. Together, we are salt, and we are light.

CHAPTER EIGHT

TWO KINGDOMS

Scripture Reading: Matt. 12:22-28; Luke 22:3a; Acts 5:3; John 12:31; 1 John 5:19; Eph. 2:2-3, 5; Phil. 2:13; Eph. 6:11-12; Acts 26:18a; Col. 1:13

In the last chapter we saw clearly that there are two sources in the universe, that in these two sources are two lives, and out of these two lives come two kingdoms. God has His life, and out of His life the kingdom of God comes into existence. Satan has his evil life, out of which the kingdom of Satan comes into existence. Therefore, in the universe there are two kingdoms—the kingdom of God and the kingdom of Satan.

THE KINGDOM OF SATAN

We need to see that both the kingdom of God and the kingdom of Satan are something of life. The kingdom of God is a matter of the divine life, and the kingdom of Satan is a matter of the satanic life. If you consider the world situation, you will see that the entire human race is a kingdom, not merely of the human life but even more of the satanic life. Today's human society is a kingdom of the satanic life. Humanity has become the totality of the satanic life with all its activities. Thus, the human kingdom has become the satanic kingdom, the kingdom of Satan.

Matthew 12:22-28 mentions the kingdom of Satan. A blind and dumb person, who was demon-possessed, was brought to the Lord Jesus. As we mentioned in chapter 2, in the Bible a demon signifies rebellion against God. The Lord Jesus cast out the demons. According to our understanding, this is simply the casting out of demons and the recovery of a human being. According to the Lord's interpretation, however, something far greater was involved. This was not simply the casting out of a demon and the healing of a sick person; it was the coming of the kingdom of God. Wherever the demon is cast out, there the kingdom of God comes. The Pharisees hated the Lord Jesus, and they criticized His action, saying that He cast out demons by Beelzebul, the ruler of the demons. The title *Beelzebul* refers to the ruler of the demons. The Pharisees knew that Satan was the ruler of the demons, and they scorned the Lord Jesus, accusing Him of casting out demons by Satan. He rebuked

them, saying, “If I, by Beelzebul, cast out the demons, by whom do your sons cast them out?” (12:27). What the Pharisees said to the Lord Jesus was a falsehood, but what He said to them was the truth. Remember that the Pharisees were extremely religious. In their own eyes and in their own understanding, they were people who worshipped God. However, the Lord Jesus told them that their sons cast out demons by Satan. According to their concept, they were worshipping God; in actuality, they were joined with Satan. Surely the Pharisees felt that they were serving God, worshipping God, and doing everything to please Him. They were not pagans. They were not idol worshippers, and they did not practice witchcraft. They were people who tried to worship God and to serve God. But the Lord Jesus exposed them, saying that their sons cast out demons by the power of Satan. This means that they were one with Satan.

In His word to the Pharisees, the Lord revealed that Satan has his kingdom (v. 26). There is another kingdom besides the kingdom of God. Today the situation is exactly the same in principle. Although some may worship God in name and in form, actually, they are joined with Satan and are serving Satan. They think they are in the kingdom of God; actually, they are in the kingdom of Satan. Even while they are worshipping God, it is possible for them to be in the kingdom of Satan. They may think that they are working for the kingdom of God yet unknowingly be working for the kingdom of Satan.

We need to see these two kingdoms—the kingdom of God and the kingdom of Satan. Eventually, the kingdom of God will swallow up the kingdom of Satan. When he was created by God, Adam was innocent. God placed Adam before two trees, which denoted two sources: God and Satan. God’s intention in creating man was to establish the kingdom. According to the Bible, the ultimate consummation of God’s work is a kingdom. In the Bible, a house represents a family, and a city represents a kingdom. In eternity there will not be a house but a city—New Jerusalem. The apostle John said that he saw no temple in the city (Rev. 21:22). The temple will be enlarged to become the city, and the city represents the kingdom. Eventually, God will establish His kingdom.

How will God establish His kingdom? When we hear the word *establish*, we may think it means to assemble various pieces or elements together, placing one next to the other. However, this is not God’s way. God’s way is to put

Himself into man as life. This life will grow in us until it produces the kingdom.

Before God could get into man, Satan entered into man in a very subtle way. Satan, like all deceivers, was a good talker. By his subtle speaking, he indoctrinated man with his thoughts. He injected his evil thoughts into the human mind. The principle is the same today. Whenever you accept a certain thought, then you may act upon it. The thought comes first, then the action. The thoughts people take in eventually influence their behavior. After Satan had injected his evil thoughts into the human mind, man exercised his body to take the fruit of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil into him.

TWO TREES

It is of tremendous importance to realize that at the very beginning, there were two trees—the tree of life and the tree of the knowledge of good and evil (Gen. 2:9). The tree of life signifies God, and the tree of knowledge signifies Satan. Man took the tree of knowledge into him, meaning that Satan entered into man. Satan, as sin personified, is now inside of man (Rom. 7:8, 11, 17, 20). After coming into man, Satan began to saturate him, poison him, and take full possession of him. Thus, man became corrupted and darkened. To be darkened and corrupted by Satan means to be placed under the authority of Satan. Man became a citizen in Satan's kingdom, subject to the rule of Satan. Everyone born of man is likewise a citizen in Satan's kingdom. Every human being is subject to Satan by birth. Therefore, men steal, fight, and kill. This is the kingdom of Satan. This is the totality of the satanic life with all its activities.

One day Jehovah-plus came. God was incarnated as a man. God's desire is to come into man. When we call on the name of the Lord Jesus, He comes into us as life. From that point on, God grows within us. God's growth in us means that He is spreading within us. The more God grows, the more He spreads, and the more ground He occupies within us. The more ground He occupies, the more He reigns. The kingdom is God's divine reign in us through the inward growth of life. The kingdom of God is God being life to us, spreading in us, occupying the ground in us, and reigning over our whole being.

TWO SPIRITS

There are two kingdoms, and there are two spirits. John 4:24 shows that God is Spirit, and Ephesians 2:2 reveals that Satan, the ruler of the authority of the air, is also a spirit. This evil spirit is operating in every human being. The word *operating* is a strong word in Greek. Satan is operating, working, with a definite purpose in a definite way. In every human being there is a satanic operator, the spirit who works in the sons of disobedience. People may talk about freedom, liberty, and independence. Everyone likes to be independent. However, not one fallen person is independent, because he is under the operation of Satan.

THE RULER OF THIS WORLD

Matthew 12:26 indicates that Satan has a kingdom, and John 12:31 describes Satan as the ruler of this world. Satan is not only the operator; he is the ruler. He rules the whole earth, and he has many subordinates, many ranks, under him, which Ephesians 6:12 describes as rulers and authorities. These are some of the various ranks in Satan's kingdom. He is the ruler of this world, and he is also the ruler of the authority of the air. On the earth there is the human race, and in the air there are the rebellious angelic powers. Satan's kingdom is composed of the fallen human race and the rebellious angels. On the earth, the members of the fallen human race are the citizens of the kingdom of Satan; in the air, the rebellious angelic powers and principalities rule this earth for Satan. He is the ruler of the authority of the air. Satan, as the evil spirit, has come into every human being. He operates in every human being without exception. By being such an operator, he has produced a kingdom. Satan now dwells in man's body.

If you have ever had the experience of casting out demons, you know that the demons like to take the human body as their dwelling place. From his base of operation in the body, Satan will attempt to control the person's whole being—his mind, emotion, and will. A demon-possessed person is always very much in his mentality. If you can turn him from the prison of his mind to the spirit, the demon, for the most part, will be gone. However, it is difficult to do this. Therefore, you must cast out the demon by the name of the Lord Jesus. After the demon has been driven out, you must help this person turn to his spirit and not to exercise his mentality too much. Otherwise, the demons may return to possess him once more.

THE KINGDOM OF GOD

Satan takes the human body as his dwelling place, but the Lord Jesus takes the human spirit as His dwelling place. God in His sovereignty has preserved the human spirit for Himself. Although the human spirit has been influenced by the evil body and the corrupt mentality to the point that it has been deadened, we can find no hint in the Bible that Satan has ever entered into the human spirit. When we repent and believe in the Lord Jesus, He immediately comes into our spirit. The enemy tries his best to hide this matter of the human spirit from Christians. The Bible tells us clearly that the Lord Jesus Christ is with our spirit (2 Tim. 4:22). From our spirit He is growing and spreading within us, taking possession of more ground in our being. By occupying more ground within us, He actually reigns within us. This is the inward reigning of the Lord Jesus.

Consider the case of a young man who has recently been saved. Before he was saved, he was altogether in the principle of a demon. In every part of his being, he was in rebellion against God. But one day the Lord Jesus came into him. The more he says, “Hallelujah,” and the more he pray-reads the Word, the more the Lord Jesus spreads within him. The more he calls, “O Lord Jesus!” the more ground the Lord occupies within him. When he calls on the Lord and praises the Lord, the Lord spreads within him. However, many times the Lord Jesus cannot get through. The Lord cannot penetrate his mentality, his thoughts. His concepts are a stronghold, and the Lord Jesus cannot get through. Part of his being is under the reigning of the Lord Jesus, but in other parts of his being, there are strongholds resisting His rule. That is rebellion and is in the principle of a demon. If the Lord Jesus cannot penetrate this stronghold after a few attempts, this young man will lose his appetite for praying, for reading the Word, and for calling on the name of the Lord. If He tries and cannot get through, He will wait. Perhaps after two weeks or two months or even two years, He will try once again. Perhaps this young brother will eventually receive some help from another brother and become freshly stirred up for the Lord. Because the Lord Jesus will not pass over any problem, once again He will touch the old stronghold, but this time the brother has learned the lesson and immediately gives in to the Lord, saying, “Amen Lord.” The Lord Jesus gets through, and He spreads more. This means that He grows more in this young brother and occupies more ground within him. This growth is the gradual coming of the kingdom of God within him. Eventually, all his inward parts—his mind, emotion, and will—will be fully saturated by the Lord Jesus. In other words, the Lord has

fully grown up in this brother. In a sense, He has reached the harvest stage within him. He is ripe, ready, and mature. He is like one of the five prudent virgins (Matt. 25). If many Christians who are seeking the Lord would be like this, the full manifestation of the kingdom would come.

Now we can understand how the kingdom comes. The Lord Jesus sows Himself as a seed into us, making us His growing field. Step by step and little by little, He grows within us. He is very patient, and gradually He will possess our whole being. Eventually, the Lord Jesus will take us over in a full way. He will occupy our mind, our emotions, our will, and every inward part of our being. In this way He will reign within us, and the kingdom will come fully and completely. The kingdom does not come as a sudden change; it is a matter of Christ as life growing within us. However, this is not strictly an individual matter. We must grow with other Christians.

Many Christians have been ensnared by various religious things. You need to set all these things aside and return to your spirit, realizing that Christ is within your spirit. Your real need is the expansion of Christ within you. Although formalism may help people, eventually it becomes a frustration. The fundamental teachings also help people, but eventually they hold people back from fulfilling God's eternal purpose. The same thing is true about the charismatic experiences. Although many Christians were helped by them, eventually they were frustrated by the very things that helped them. Our basic need today is to realize that our dear Lord Jesus is in our spirit, growing and spreading within us. We need to pray, "Lord, have mercy on me. Grant me the grace always to say Amen to You. O Lord, grow in me, expand in me, and take me over. Lord, occupy every part of my being." This is our need today. We all have been transferred out of the kingdom of Satan into the kingdom of Christ. We need Christ to spread Himself within us and to gain all the ground. This will bring the full manifestation of the kingdom.

CHAPTER NINE

THE BATTLEFIELD OF THE TWO KINGDOMS

Scripture Reading: Matt. 12:26; Acts 26:18a; Phil. 2:13; Matt. 10:19-20; Eph. 2:2; 4:17-18; 2 Cor. 4:4; Eph. 6:11-12; 2 Cor. 10:4-5; 11:2-3; Rom. 8:6

The Bible reveals that in the universe there are three parties: God, man, and Satan. According to Genesis 2, man was placed before two trees. The tree of life signified God, and the tree of knowledge denoted Satan, the evil one. The revelation of the Bible declares that God's intention is to come into man and be one with man. Satan, however, got into man before God could do so. Satan took the first step, getting into man not according to God's way but according to his own evil way. God's sovereignty is displayed here, for God allowed Satan a certain degree of liberty to do what he wanted with man. However, God did not allow him to do everything he wanted. The book of Job demonstrates this principle. God permitted Satan to do certain things to Job, yet He limited him (1:12; 2:6).

THE SPIRIT OF MAN

Although God has permitted Satan to damage man, He has never allowed him to enter into the spirit of man, because the spirit of man is the lamp of the Lord (Prov. 20:27). God created man in a very specific way. Some people consider man as a kind of animal, but God does not consider man as an animal. None of the birds, fish, or beasts has a spirit. They are animals because they do not have a spirit. We are human beings because we have a spirit. God is Spirit, and we have a spirit. Those who worship God must worship in spirit (John 4:24). Animals never worship God. Have you ever heard of monkeys erecting a temple and worshipping God? Have you ever seen a dog or a cat worshipping God? However, if you study world history from ancient times to the present, you will realize that man has always worshipped God. Perhaps man has not always worshipped properly, but he has always worshipped, because there is a worshipping organ inside of him, his human spirit. The animals have some things in common with man, but man has something that no animals have. He has a human spirit. Therefore, we are not animals; we are human beings. The difference between animals and human beings is this one thing—only man has a human spirit.

Throughout the centuries, Satan in his subtlety has covered this matter of the human spirit. Few Christians speak about the human spirit. Some even say that the human spirit is the same as the human soul. Although dogs and cats have a soul, they do not have a spirit. Our human spirit is the specific organ for worshipping God. So our spirit is both the lamp of the Lord and the sanctuary of God. According to Hebrews 4:12-16, our spirit is the Holy of Holies. Our spirit is the lamp of the Lord, and it is the Holy of Holies.

God allowed Satan to touch man. This is God's wisdom. God even permitted Satan to enter into man but not to go so far as to enter man's spirit. Satan was permitted to deaden and darken man's spirit but never to enter into it. However, Satan came into man's physical body. This is why such chapters as Romans 7 tell us that sin and all its lusts are in the members of our body. Sin and its lusts are in the members of our body because our body is the dwelling place of Satan. Satan dwells in our physical body as sin personified (vv. 17, 20). Only a living person can dwell somewhere. From his base in our physical body, Satan wants to take over our soul, to place our soul under his absolute control. But, Hallelujah! Not one verse in the whole Bible tells us that our spirit is under Satan's control. When you preach the gospel to people, you should touch their spirit; you should touch their conscience, which is the main part of their spirit. In your preaching, never argue with people. The more you argue, the more they will have something to say in response and the more their minds will be stirred up. When you argue with people, you strengthen their soul. It is impossible to convince sinners by arguing with them. Rather, by the grace and power of God, touch their conscience. Their conscience is a part of their spirit, and when you touch their conscience, their spirit will be moved. I have seen many cases of people who continued to argue with God in their mind but condemned themselves in their conscience. In their mind they argued with God, but in their spirit they repented before God. Whenever you are trying to help other people, never touch their mentality, because the human mind is the stronghold of Satan. The generals in an army know not to strike the enemy's strong point in a battle. They always attack the weak point. Do not touch a person's mind. If you touch his mind, the whole kingdom of Satan will rise up against you.

Suppose a husband and wife begin to argue and to exchange bitter words. Then afterward, the wife comes to you for help in solving their problems. It is not easy to listen to a sister talk about her husband without being stirred up in your mind or trapped by Satan. However, if you know the subtlety of the

enemy, you would not approach the brother by touching his mind. You would not fight against the stronghold. You would take another way. You would turn to another side and touch a weak point. Do not touch the problem with his wife. Do not talk about his wife at all, because the problem with his wife is fully occupying his mind and filling his thoughts. The way to deal with him is to touch his spirit, to touch his conscience. Do not talk about his wife; talk about loving the Lord. His mind is filled with thoughts of his wife, and this is a very touchy, explosive issue. Talk to him about the Lord. Touch his spirit and his conscience. After ten minutes he may be able to pray. The more you pray with him, the more his spirit will be touched. Eventually, the Lord will have a way to come out of his spirit and spread into his mind. Then he will repent and confess, even weeping before the Lord about the way he has dealt with his wife.

Satan has come into our body, and from our body he exercises his control over our soul. Thus, Satan works from the outside in. The Lord works in the opposite direction, from the inside out. One day He came into our spirit, the center, the hub, of our being, making it His dwelling place (Rom. 8:16; 2 Tim. 4:22; 1 Cor. 6:17). From this dwelling place in our spirit, He works outward toward the soul. Satan works in our body toward our soul; the Lord works from our spirit toward our soul.

Now we can see that all three parties—God, man, and Satan—are in man. In the garden of Eden, Adam had two choices facing him: the tree of life and the tree of the knowledge of good and evil. In the church today, the tree of knowledge is in our body, and the tree of life is in our spirit. The two sources are now within us. We must realize that we are complicated persons, having three parties within us. We know that we have three parts to our being—the spirit, the soul, and the body. Do you realize that in your body, that is, your flesh, Satan has made his abode? And do you realize that in your spirit the Lord has made His dwelling place? Between the body and the spirit is the soul, the self. You yourself dwell in your soul. Therefore, Satan dwells in your body, the Lord Jesus dwells in your spirit, and you dwell in your soul. This makes for a very complicated situation! Before you were saved, you were not that complicated; you were rather simple because you continually went along with Satan. However, a controversy began the day you believed in the Lord Jesus. Now there is a constant struggle because within you there are three dwellers: Satan in your body, Christ in your spirit, and you yourself in your soul.

Perhaps even today you have had some difficulty because of this complicated situation within you.

THREE KINGDOMS

Since Satan has come into us and since the Lord Jesus has also come into us, it is possible for us to be in three kingdoms. If we live in our soul, we are certainly in the human kingdom. If we live according to the flesh, we become a part of the satanic kingdom. If we walk in the spirit and live according to the spirit, we are in the kingdom of God. However, it is very difficult for anyone to be in the human kingdom. The human kingdom in our soul has become very weak and fragile. With even a little smiting, it is broken and subdued. Thus, whenever we try to be human, we merely succeed in being devilish. Whenever we attempt to be good, we discover that we are bad. Whenever we try to be patient or kind and not to lose our temper, we inevitably lose our temper. Why is this? The evil one will not allow us to be a proper human being. Satan will always try to subdue us and have us under his control. It is difficult for the human kingdom to be independent. At best the human kingdom is a small colony in the satanic kingdom. The human kingdom is always under the control of the satanic kingdom. Practically speaking, there are actually only two kingdoms on the earth today: the kingdom of Satan, including the subdued human kingdom, and the kingdom of God.

THE STRONGHOLDS IN THE MIND

The battlefield of these two kingdoms is our mind. The kingdom of Satan fights against the kingdom of God in the battlefield of our mind. The spiritual warfare between God and Satan is altogether in our mind. Although the Lord Jesus is now in our spirit, He has a big problem. He cannot easily penetrate our mind. Our mind is a stronghold, and it is hard for the Lord Jesus to come into it. Second Corinthians 10:4-5 reveals that there are strongholds within us, which are our rebellious thoughts belonging to our reprobate mind. Paul says that the spiritual warfare is simply to overthrow the thoughts, the reasonings in our mind. To overthrow the reasonings means to subdue the mind, to take over the mind. Many Christians today are under the control of Satan in their mind. The strongholds consist of the concepts, ideas, opinions, judgments, even the very way of thinking—all of which are elements in the mind. Many times people say, “I don’t agree with that!” This simply means that they are clinging to something in their mind.

CORRUPTED FROM THE SIMPLICITY

I like the word Paul used in 2 Corinthians 11:3. Paul said that he was very concerned for the Corinthians lest their thoughts be corrupted from the simplicity toward Christ. Although I have been in the Lord's work for many years, I have yet to meet a person who is truly simple. Yet I would say that the most blessed persons are simple people—very simple and single. The word *simplicity* may also be translated into "singleness." Most Christians today are not simple; they are very complicated because they have collected all kinds of doctrines. They think that the more doctrines they have, the better, but actually, the more doctrines they have, the more complicated they become.

The word *corrupted* here is very meaningful. Part of verse 3 can also be translated in this way: "that your minds would be corrupted by being seduced from the simplicity." Whenever our thoughts are seduced from the simplicity and purity toward Christ, our mind will be corrupted. It is easy to fill people with teaching, but it is a difficult task to empty them of their teaching. It is easy to load people with teaching, but once the teaching has entered into them, it is exceedingly hard for anyone to unload it. However, as long as we keep the seducing teachings in our mind, our mind will be corrupted. For us to experience the riches of Christ and to enjoy Him, we all need to be simple. If we are not simple, we will be in our seduced and corrupted mentality. This is a dreadful condition. The spiritual warfare today is mainly to capture the mind, to cast down the strongholds in the mind. Spiritual warfare is primarily a matter of fighting the enemy in our mind.

BINDING THE STRONG MAN

In Matthew 12:29 the Lord Jesus said that unless the strong man is bound, no one can enter his house and plunder his goods. If we are going to plunder his goods, even all his house, we must first bind the strong man. The strong man is Satan, and Satan is in our physical body, endeavoring to control our mind. We need to bind Satan, the strong man, in the human mind. Then we can plunder his goods.

All the brothers who bear responsibility in the churches must realize that most of the problems in the churches come from the brothers' and sisters' minds. According to the Bible, the church that had the most problems was the

church at Corinth, and the main reason for the problems was the dissenting opinions. Opinions, of course, are problems in the mind. Therefore, Paul wrote that they needed to be attuned in the same mind and in the same opinion (1 Cor. 1:10). Although all the saints need to be attuned in the same mind and in the same opinion, the leading brothers must also fight the battle in prayer. They must not argue with people but pray specifically, "Lord, bind the strong man. Bind the strong man in the dissenting thoughts of the dear saints! O Lord, we can do nothing! We ask You to bind the strong man!" The thoughts of the sisters are touchy, and the thoughts of the brothers are explosive. If you touch the thoughts, you will suffer. The best way is not to touch the thoughts but to touch the throne of authority and bind the strong man. Once the strong man has been bound, you can plunder his goods. Eventually, you will see that all the dear brothers and sisters will be helped one by one. They will not be helped by your arguing or convincing but by the binding of the strong man. When a problem arises in the church, never touch the thoughts. Always touch the throne, asking the Lord to bind the strong man. This is a matter of the kingdom—the kingdom of Satan or the kingdom of God. The mind is the battlefield, and we all must fight the battle to capture the mind.

Second Corinthians 4:4 says that the god of this age has blinded the thoughts of the unbelievers. Satan's tactic is to constantly blind people's thoughts. We have to pray to bind the strong man, to bind the god of this age. Ephesians 4:17-18 speaks of the "vanity of their mind." The worldly people walk in the vanity of their mind. Everything in their mind is vain. Verse 18 uses another term, *darkened in their understanding.* The understanding of the worldly people has been darkened. Also, there is a third term, *the hardness of their heart.* In these two verses we see the vanity of the mind, the darkened understanding, and the hardness of the heart. Suppose your mind was filled with vanity, your understanding was darkened, and your heart was hardened. What a pitiful person you would be! Not only are the worldly people like this today, but also many Christians are exactly the same way. Their mind has been filled with vanity, their understanding has been fully darkened, and their heart has been totally hardened. What shall we do about this? We must pray to bind the strong man, and then we can plunder all his goods. The goods are God's goods, but they have been usurped by the enemy. Now we must rescue them for the kingdom by binding the strong man.

THE LORD'S RECOVERY

We are in the Lord's recovery. The Lord's recovery is radically different from today's Christianity. Regardless of how careful we are and how properly we behave ourselves, we can never avoid controversy. What shall we do? Never argue, for argument never avails. In the Lord's recovery, our best course of action is to bind the strong man by prayer. If we will spend more time before the throne touching the highest authority, appealing to the highest authority, and asking the Lord to bind the strong man, we will certainly see something happen.

Today the controversy between the Lord's recovery and Christianity is absolutely related to the mind. Many people cling to their doctrines. It was the same during the time of the Lord Jesus. If you reflect upon the situation that the Lord Jesus faced while He was on the earth as recorded in the four Gospels, you will see that there was a continual controversy, a battling, between the Lord Jesus and the Pharisees, scribes, and lawyers. All those people had acquired many doctrines and teachings, and they fought against the Lord Jesus with the Scriptures. There was a constant warfare between the Lord Jesus and all the religious people. In the four Gospels it is difficult to find a record of any Gentiles fighting against the Lord Jesus. Those who fought against Him were the people who held to their Bible knowledge. The battle was in their mind. Today the controversy between the Lord's recovery and Christianity is the same. If we stay in the realm of knowledge, we can accomplish nothing. Not one of the scribes, lawyers, or Pharisees was convinced by the Lord's arguments. The more we argue, the more we strengthen the stronghold of Satan and the satanic kingdom, which is in the human mind.

EXERCISING THE SPIRIT

However, we do have a way: binding the strong man by exercising our spirit. We must have the constant realization and awareness that Satan is in the human body controlling the human mind, and the Lord Jesus is in the human spirit, waiting for an opportunity to spread Himself into all the inward parts of the human soul. We must always cooperate with the Lord Jesus by exercising our spirit. The best way to exercise our spirit is to forget our thoughts and simply call, "O Lord Jesus!" Calling, "O Lord Jesus" will simplify you. The more you call on the Lord in this way, the more simple you will

become. You will be simple, but you will have a strong spirit. Then you will no longer like to argue. When you touch the human mind, you touch the stronghold of Satan. If you touch that stronghold, you will suffer. Instead, turn to the spirit. When you turn to the spirit, Satan will tremble.

TAKING NO THOUGHT

In Matthew 10:19 (KJV), the Lord Jesus said, "Take no thought." These words *take no thought* are very meaningful. In the early morning we are tempted to take thought. But at that time, take no thought. Take no thought about the leading brothers. Take no thought about the sisters or about your roommate or about your wife. The more you take thought about your wife, the more you may condemn her. Take no thought about your husband. On all occasions and in every circumstance, take no thought, but cooperate with the Spirit. If the worldly people were to take no thought, they would have nothing to speak because they do not have the Spirit of the Father, but we do have Him. Therefore, we should take no thought and simply follow the Spirit. If you continue to take thought about your wife, after three months you may have many problems. The same is true about the wives taking thought of their husbands. Take no thought about your husband, but go along with the Spirit. Then, day after day you will say, "Hallelujah, Praise the Lord!" We have something better than our own thoughts. We have something more prevailing, something that is high and rich and living—the Triune God. The Spirit of the Father is the application of the Triune God. We have the Triune God in our spirit. This is the kingdom. When you take no thought, Satan stops. When you cooperate with the Spirit, Satan trembles. Then you have victory. To take no thought and to go along with the Spirit is the kingdom of God. When the Lord cast out demons by the Spirit of God, it meant that the kingdom of God had come. As long as you cooperate with the Spirit, you are in the kingdom.

SETTING THE MIND ON THE SPIRIT

We are all familiar with Romans 8:6. To set the mind on the flesh is death. Death is a matter of the satanic kingdom. To set the mind on the spirit is life and peace. These are matters of the kingdom of God. If we set our mind on the spirit, we are in the kingdom of God. But when we set our mind on the flesh, we are in the kingdom of Satan. Whether we remain in the kingdom of Satan or the kingdom of God depends absolutely on where we set our mind. To set our mind on the flesh is to be in the kingdom of Satan; to set our mind

on the spirit is to be in the kingdom of God. If we set our mind on the flesh, all the demons will rise up and swarm. However, if we set our mind on the spirit, the demons will be gone. To set the mind on the spirit really casts out the demons. “If I, by the Spirit of God, cast out the demons, then the kingdom of God has come upon you” (Matt. 12:28). The practicality of the kingdom life is simply to set our mind on the spirit and to go along with the indwelling Spirit. We have a way to live the kingdom life. The practicality of the kingdom life is in the spirit. When we live the kingdom life, we take no thought, and we set our mind on the spirit.

CHAPTER TEN

THE KINGDOM AND THE SOUL-LIFE

Scripture Reading: Matt. 10:37-39; Luke 14:26-27; 17:31-33; Matt. 16:21-26; Mark 8:34-36; Luke 9:23-25; John 12:24-25

We have seen that Satan is in our flesh, that the Lord Jesus is in our spirit, and that we ourselves are in our soul. Whether Satan or the Lord Jesus would gain the victory depends on the attitude we take. If our attitude is one with Satan, he will be victorious. If our attitude is one with the Lord Jesus, He will be victorious.

In the four Gospels the Lord mentions the soul several times. Many people have studied the verses in the four Gospels in which the Lord Jesus speaks about the soul, but they have not seen that these verses are linked to the kingdom. We must realize that our soul is closely related to the kingdom.

In the last chapter we pointed out that our mind is the battlefield between the kingdom of God and the kingdom of Satan. The mind is the leading part of the soul. The second and third parts comprising the soul are the emotion, the loving organ, and the will, the organ of intention and decision. Besides the mind, emotion, and will, there is another thing, very hidden and very strong in our soul—the self.

THE SOUL AND THE WORLD

Our soul is also related to the world. The thing that most hinders our Christian life is not sin but the world. Sin is dreadful and must be condemned. However, the world is even more destructive and damaging to our Christian life. More Christians are hindered from going on with the Lord by the world than by sin. Sin is related to our flesh; the world is related to our soul. Romans 6:6 tells us that because our old man has been crucified with Christ, the body of sin is annulled, or unemployed. Our body has become jobless. Therefore, the matter of sin is related to our body, to our flesh. The world, on the contrary, is connected to our soul. This connection is proved by Matthew 16:26, where the Lord Jesus asked what it would profit a man if he should gain the whole world but forfeit his soul-life.

SOUL AND *SOUL-LIFE*

In the Greek language the words *soul* and *soul-life* are the same word. It is difficult for the translators to decide which English word to use. In some verses the Greek word, *psuche,* is translated as "soul"; in other verses it is translated as "life"—"soul-life." In many instances the King James Version renders this word as "life." This makes the matter quite complicated and may give us the impression that the word *life* in such a case is the same as eternal life. But the soul-life is absolutely different from eternal life.

ITEMS RELATED TO THE SOUL

The human soul is complex. At least six items are related to it. The mind, the will, and the emotion are all in the soul. In addition, the self, the soul-life, and the world are related to the soul.

As we have seen, Satan is in our flesh, operating for his kingdom, and the Lord Jesus is in our spirit, operating for the kingdom of God. Ephesians 2:2 tells us that Satan, the ruler of the authority of the air, is the spirit that now operates in the sons of disobedience. This word *operates* is the same word used in Philippians 2:13, which tells us that God is operating in us. So, there are two operators within us, one in our flesh and the other in our spirit. Both of these operators are working toward the soul. Satan works from the outside inward, and God works from the inside outward. Both are aiming toward the soul of man, making our soul very strategic. Whether God will have His kingdom or Satan will have his kingdom depends upon our soul. Our soul is strategic for both kingdoms. This is why the Lord Jesus speaks so much in Matthew, Mark, and Luke about taking up the cross in relation to the soul (Matt. 16:24-25; Mark 8:34-36; Luke 9:23-24). We must apply the cross to our soul because Satan dwells in our flesh and seeks to control our soul. Our soul has been saturated with Satan himself. Our mind, will, emotion, self, soul-life, and relationship with the world have been saturated and permeated with Satan.

PETER BEING ONE WITH SATAN

Matthew 16 tells us that one day the Lord Jesus had some very good fellowship with His disciples in which He told them that He would be persecuted, put to death by the religious people, and raised again on the third day. Peter heard the Lord's fellowship, but he did not hear the

word *raised;* he only heard the word *killed*. Because he loved the Lord, Peter said, "God be merciful to You, Lord!" This was a good suggestion, and it proceeded out of a good intention and concern. If there had been no record of the Lord's reply to Peter's suggestion, we would never have learned that Peter's concern was satanic. But the Lord Jesus saw through this and spoke boldly to Peter, rebuking him: "Get behind Me, Satan!" Can you imagine that Peter could express such a noble concern for the Lord and at the same time be one with Satan? What subtlety! Peter thought that he loved the Lord. He did not realize that his suggestion was from Satan. He thought that he was being a good disciple of the Lord Jesus, displaying a genuine concern for Him. If the Lord had not rebuked Peter in such a strong way, we all would have admired his concern. The Lord rebuked Peter because his mind was not set on the things of God, but on the things of men (v. 23). Whenever we set our mind on the things of men, we are one with Satan. This is serious. If we fail to set our mind on the things of God but set it on the things of men, immediately we are one with Satan.

MAN'S SOUL BEING SATURATED WITH SATAN

We must realize that our soul has been thoroughly saturated with Satan. In our soul we are one with Satan and permeated with Satan. Whether you have a good intention or a bad intention, whether you love people or hate people, and whether you are a gentleman or a criminal, you are saturated with Satan.

What could be better than a noble concern for the Lord? Peter had such a concern for the Lord Jesus, yet the Lord rebuked him because he was occupied by Satan. If you set your mind on the things of God, that is excellent. But if you set your mind on the things of men, you are in the kingdom of Satan. This portion of Matthew 16 reveals that our soul in its fallen condition is one with Satan. Because this is the condition of our soul, we must apply the cross to it.

I appreciate the Lord's word in Matthew 10:37-39. The Lord said that anyone who loves parents or children above Him is not worthy of Him. If you love your parents or your children more than you love the Lord Jesus, you are finished with Him. Then in Luke 14:26-27 the Lord spoke of hate. The Lord said that if anyone comes to Him and fails to hate his father and mother and wife and children and brothers and sisters, and even his own soul-life, he cannot be His disciple. These two passages linked together prove that if you

are one with Satan, it makes no difference whether you love or hate. Our eyes must be opened to see what we are in our soul. In our soul is the kingdom of Satan. Our soul has been fully saturated with Satan and has become his kingdom, his domain.

BEARING THE CROSS

God's way to deal with the soul is the cross. The cross must do its work in us. We have been put on the cross already, but we must stay there. To bear the cross means to remain on the cross. The destiny and destination of our soul is the cross. The good soul and the bad soul, the loving soul and the hating soul, have been put on the cross. God has put your soul on the cross, and it must remain there. The Lord Jesus first bore the cross and then was crucified on the cross. We, on the contrary, were first crucified on the cross, and now we bear the cross continually. Never get off the cross, for God has put you there. Whenever we come down from the cross, immediately we become one with Satan. We saw in the last chapter that because our mind is a battlefield, we must pray for the Lord to bind the strong man. However, for our emotions, for our loving and hating organ, we must bear the cross. For our mind we must bind the strong man, and for our emotions we must bear the cross.

CRUCIFYING THE WORLD

Our relationship with the world also requires that we bear the cross. The Bible tells us about a woman who loved the world very much—Lot's wife. The Lord Jesus warned us concerning her, saying, "Remember Lot's wife" (Luke 17:32). Lot's wife loved the worldly things in the city of Sodom. Although she was taken out of the city, she cherished the memories of the worldly things. She could not forget the world. She looked back and became a pillar of salt. Therefore, the Lord Jesus warned us to remember Lot's wife.

Suppose there is a brother who, like Lot's wife, loves the things of the world. If you pray for this brother, saying, "Lord, bind the strong man," it will not work. This will work for a brother who has a strong mind full of opinions, but it will not work for a brother who loves the world. A brother who loves the world needs to bear the cross. To deal with our love of the world in our emotions is not a matter of binding the strong man but of bearing the cross in the soul. Many of the dear sisters find shopping to be so sweet. Although some people may not have money for shopping, they enjoy window shopping.

They love the things of the world. If we remain on the cross, we certainly will not go shopping that much. The soulish love of the world must be crossed out. This kind of love of the world in the soul-life is the satanic kingdom. If this is not crossed out, the Lord Jesus in our spirit will have no way to spread into our emotions. If the sisters love to shop, their emotions will be fully drawn away from the Lord. Many dear sisters have hardly grown one inch in the Lord because they love the worldly things so much. There is no room in their emotions for the Lord Jesus to come in; nearly every bit of ground in their emotions has been occupied by worldly things. If you can easily forget how many worldly possessions you have, that would indicate that you do not love them. However, it is difficult for most sisters to forget the things that they have. Every sister recalls these things very well. Some sisters do not know how many chapters Matthew has, but they remember very well how many dresses they have. Some may have been Christians for more than twenty years and yet be unable to tell exactly how many chapters there are in the book of Acts. What is occupying your emotions? Where is your love? What is the object of your love? This is a matter of the kingdom of Satan or the kingdom of God. We have used these practical illustrations because the Lord has shown us that the kingdom is not merely a dispensation or a sphere. The kingdom is the totality of the Christian life. It must be practical.

REMAINING ON THE CROSS

All the verses in which the Lord Jesus spoke about the soul are related to the kingdom of God. Our soul must be dealt with in the matter of love. What we love and where we put our love must be dealt with. How we exercise love must be practically dealt with by the cross. If our soul has never been dealt with by the cross in the matter of love, regardless of what we may think, we are in the kingdom of Satan. Although we are children of God in our spirit, we remain a part of the kingdom of Satan in our soul.

It is not simply a matter of being sinful or worldly. It is a matter of whether or not our soul has been dealt with by the cross in the matter of love. If we love, our love must first be crossed out; if we hate, our hate must be crossed out. We need to love and we need to hate, but our love and our hate must first be crossed out. All the soul must be dealt with by the cross. The Lord has crossed out our soul already. Galatians 2:20 declares, “I am crucified with Christ.” Since we have been crucified with Christ, we must remain on the cross. We must stay at the place where we have been already crossed out. This

means that we must bear the cross and never give any ground to the Satan-saturated soul. We must keep our soul on the cross, especially in the matter of love. If we want to love something or someone, we must love it by having our soul crossed out. This is not a theory; this is the practice and practicality of the kingdom life.

Occasionally, you may attempt to be spiritual. You may say, "I will look to the Lord and see how He leads. I will do all my shopping according to the Lord's leading." This sounds very spiritual. However, regardless of how the Lord leads, you still go to the department store. The Lord gave you no leading, yet you bought many things, and these possessions are still at home condemning you. These things may not be sinful, but they are worldly; the Lord did not lead you to buy them. You bought them according to the love in your soul. This is the kingdom of Satan. It is not simply a matter of being sinless or holy or free from the world; it is altogether a matter of being either in the kingdom of Satan or the kingdom of God. If your soul is continually upon the cross, whatever you love or hate will be in the kingdom of God. Otherwise, both your love and hatred will be in the kingdom of Satan.

THE SELF

Now we come to the self, something deeper and more hidden than the love of the world. The self is more hidden and subtle than our love for our family and our children. We know that the self is in the soul, but how is the self expressed? We return once again to the mind. The self in the soul is mostly expressed by our opinion. Our concepts and opinions inevitably express the self in our soul. Peter said, "God be merciful to You, Lord!" This is a concept, an opinion, a good idea, toward the Lord. This opinion, however, exposed the self of Peter. This self is the very element of Satan. We may also turn this statement around and say that the element of Satan is the self. Whenever we express a dissenting thought or a differing opinion, we express the self.

THE MIND, THE SELF, AND SATAN

In Matthew 16 the Lord Jesus rebuked Peter, saying, "Get behind Me, Satan." Then the Lord told Peter that his mind was not set on the things of God, but on the things of men. Following this, the Lord Jesus said that those who come after Him must deny the self. By this we can see that Satan, the mind, and the self are three things in one. Satan is in the mind, and the mind

is in the self. The self is in the mind, and the mind is in Satan. These three are indivisible. It is difficult to separate the self from the mind or the mind from Satan.

The self is subtle and hidden. We may think that our concepts are merely concepts and our ideas simply ideas. But actually, our concepts and our ideas are our self. Perhaps we have never realized that our ideas and dissenting thoughts are expressions of the self and that our self is one with Satan. We all need to be crossed-out people, having no dissenting thoughts or concepts. It is not a matter of who is right and who is wrong. Strong concepts are the expression of the self. The self is always one with Satan in the soul, and the self is inevitably expressed in the concepts.

This does not mean that we should no longer have any concepts. We need to have concepts. We are not a chair or a table. Tables and chairs have no concepts, but as human beings we must have concepts. We need to have concepts, but everything depends on whether or not the self is contained in the concepts. Is the self expressed in the concepts? Although it is true that many concepts are the expression of the self, many times we may have a concept without any trace of self in it. The self has been dealt with. In the leadership and responsibility of the church life, we need to fellowship together about many things. For example, we need some concepts about what time the meetings should be and on which days they should be held. When we come together to fellowship, we need to speak something. We must understand that it is not a matter of the concept itself, but what is behind or within the concept. The self that is hidden within the concept must be dealt with, because that self is one with Satan. However, do not take this as an excuse to have many concepts; it is better not to have many concepts. If we continually express our concepts, we will express our self. What kingdom are you in? It all depends on whether or not the soul has been crossed out.

THE SOULISH LIFE

The soulish life denotes not only the soulish being but also the power and strength by which we do things. If we do things in the church and in the Lord's work according to our being and according to our strength, that is a display of the soulish life. It must be dealt with. The soulish strength must be dealt with because the more we depend upon it, the more we live in the kingdom of Satan. Not only must the self hidden within the soul be dealt with,

but also the soulish life, the soulish strength, and the soulish being must be dealt with. Whatever we are and whatever we can do must be crossed out. This must be put on the cross and kept there all the time.

Because we are believers in Christ, we all have the kingdom of God in our spirit, but we also have the kingdom of Satan in our soul. Whatever we have, whatever we are, whatever we can do, and whatever we keep in our soul must be completely dealt with by the cross. It is good to take no thought, but that is only a part. We must realize that whatever we are, whatever we have, and whatever we can do in our soul must be dealt with because the satanic kingdom is in our soul. The more our soul is crossed out, the more opportunities will be afforded to the indwelling Christ to spread Himself from our spirit into our soul. In this way our soul will be purified and saturated by the Lord Himself. Then the kingdom of God will increase, spread, and come again within us. This is the way to have the riches of Christ. This is the way to have power and impact and the blessing of the Lord. This is the central and strategic point of our Christian life related to the kingdom of God. Therefore, we all must concentrate our seeking and our attention to this one thing: to bear the cross and always afford the Lord the opportunities to spread Himself from our spirit into our soul. Then we will have the practicality of the kingdom life.

CHAPTER ELEVEN

THE MYSTERIES OF THE KINGDOM (1)

Scripture Reading: Matt. 13:3-6, 11, 18-21; 1 Cor. 3:9

Matthew is a book concerning the kingdom. As we have seen, John the Baptist proclaimed the kingdom of the heavens; the Lord Jesus later followed this preaching and taught His disciples to do the same. He sent out the twelve and also the seventy to preach the kingdom of the heavens (10:5-7; Luke 10:1, 9). The things mentioned in Matthew are related to the kingdom because the kingdom is the subject of this book. It is easy for people to be distracted when they read the book of Matthew. Many Christian readers have been distracted by the good stories and by the excellent teachings. Some Christians consider Matthew a book of stories, while others consider it a book of teachings and doctrines. Both of these approaches neglect the main topic of Matthew, which is the kingdom. Matthew is not merely a book of stories or of doctrines; it is a book on the kingdom.

John the Baptist proclaimed that the "kingdom of the heavens has drawn near" (3:2), but in fact what happened was that the man Jesus came. This indicates that the kingdom is simply the Lord Jesus, not only in Himself but in so many people, including us. This wonderful man, the Lord Jesus, is not so simple. He is the kingdom. Never forget chapter 1 of Matthew, which gives us the record of this wonderful person who is Jehovah-plus and God-plus. The Lord Jesus, the wonderful One, as Jehovah-plus and God-plus, is the kingdom. The kingdom is the Lord Jesus Himself and the Lord Jesus in all His believers. It is the totality of Christ as life spreading into us with all His activities. It is also correct to say that the kingdom is Christ. I appreciate all these statements. The kingdom is not only a dispensation or a sphere. The kingdom is also Christ as life spreading into us, growing constantly unto maturity, which will be the full manifestation of the kingdom.

THE MYSTERIES OF THE KINGDOM

The Lord Jesus referred to many mysteries, one of which is the parable of the sower. This parable is not merely a doctrine or a teaching; it is a mystery. Many people pay attention to the doctrines, but neglect the mystery of the

kingdom. The kingdom of the heavens is a mystery. Even man himself contains many mysteries. Outwardly, we can behold a man's physical characteristics: his head and shoulders, arms, legs, and skin. Because all these external features are quite evident, they are not so mysterious. Man himself, however, embodies several mysteries. One is the mystery of his physical life. It is possible to produce a wax model that is the same color, size, and shape as a real person. The only difference is that the model has no life. If we were to dissect a man to examine all his parts, the life would disappear; but if we leave him alive and whole, the life will remain. No one can adequately explain the physical life of man. Life is mysterious.

Another mystery related to man is his human spirit. What is the human spirit? Where can it be found inside a man—in his heart or head or stomach? According to the Bible, we do have a human spirit (1 Thes. 5:23), but where is it? While it is easy to locate our eyes and nose and ears, it is difficult to locate our spirit because it is a mystery.

A further mystery concerns the heart. Man has two hearts. One is the physical heart that beats constantly and pumps blood continually. However, the Bible says that man's heart is corrupt and incurably wicked (Jer. 17:9). This, of course, does not refer to the physical heart. When the Bible declares that man's heart is corrupt, it refers to another heart, his psychological heart. Thus, we have two hearts—one physical and one psychological. Although few of us have difficulties with our physical heart, every one of us has problems with his psychological heart. Where is this psychological heart? You know that you have such a heart, but it is difficult to locate because it is also a mystery. Man embodies many mysteries. The human life, the human spirit, and the psychological heart are all mysteries. Our mind, emotion, will, and conscience are mysteries.

SEVEN MYSTERIES

Matthew 13 reveals that there are many mysteries related to the kingdom of the heavens. The parables in this chapter are not merely teachings or stories; they are mysteries difficult for people to apprehend. They are mysteries, just as human life, the human spirit, and the psychological heart are mysteries. We do have some limited understanding concerning our mind, conscience, heart, spirit, and life, but they still remain mysteries. The parable of the sower is likewise a mystery. Other mysteries of the kingdom include the parable of

the tares, the mustard seed, the leaven, the treasure, the pearl, and the net. In Matthew 13 there are at least seven mysteries.

To understand these mysteries we need an open heart, and we also need to be poor in spirit. The Lord told the disciples that it was given to them to know the mysteries of the kingdom, but to the others it was not given because their hearts were hardened, and their spirits were filled with other things (vv. 11-15). The Lord turned away from those who were hardened and filled with other things. We need to pray, "Lord, grant us to be poor in our spirit. Sweep away all other things. Sweep away the doctrines and the old Bible knowledge. Lord, empty our spirit and make us poor in spirit. In our spirit we cling to nothing." You need to pray in this way. Otherwise, even after reading all these chapters, you will receive nothing. May the Lord keep us from having anything old in our spirit. Likewise, we need a pure and open heart toward the Lord. When we are poor in spirit and our heart is open toward the Lord, the revelation will immediately come, and we will understand the mysteries of the kingdom.

THE SOWER

First of all, the Lord Jesus likened Himself to a sower, not a teacher. Many Christians only consider Him as a great teacher. According to the record in John 3, Nicodemus approached the Lord, saying, "Rabbi, we know that You have come from God as a teacher" (v. 2). Immediately, the Lord told him he needed to be born anew. The Lord Jesus did not come as a teacher to teach us the doctrine of the kingdom; He came to sow the kingdom into us. The Bible reveals that this seed is the Lord Jesus Himself. He is both the Sower and the seed. He came as the Sower to sow Himself into us as the seed of life.

In the four Gospels the seed is sown into the earth. In Acts the seed produces a tender sprout. In the Epistles we find the gradual growth and blossoming, and in Revelation we have the harvest. Revelation 14 declares that the harvest is ripe. The Lord Jesus as the seed was sown in the Gospel of Matthew. This seed grows up into a sprout in the book of Acts. In the Epistles we see the growth and blossoming of the seed, and eventually there will be a harvest in the book of Revelation.

In the parable of the sower, the seed is sown into the earth, which represents our being. We are the earth. First Corinthians 3:9 says that we are

God's cultivated land. Not every place on the earth is good for sowing seed. A farmer knows this and always selects the best spot to sow his seed. He knows that some places do not afford the seed an opportunity to grow. Our human spirit is the place for the Lord Jesus to sow Himself into us, and our heart is the place for Him to grow in us. He sows Himself into our spirit, and He grows Himself into our heart.

The opening words of the Lord's teachings in Matthew 5 were, "Blessed are the poor in spirit." This was the first item that He covered. Many Christians have missed this. The Lord Jesus made the human spirit the first item, but most Christians have made it the last item, even counting it as nothing. Following this, the Lord said, "Blessed are the pure in heart" (v. 8).

The truth of the human spirit is sown in Matthew 5, and it is developed in many verses throughout the Epistles. Likewise, the truth of the human heart is sown in Matthew 5:8, and it grows in the Epistles. The book of Revelation also contains several verses about the human spirit. For instance, in 1:10 John said, "I was in spirit on the Lord's Day." In 4:2 John again said that he was in spirit. In 17:3 and 21:10 he said that he was carried away in spirit. The book of Revelation contains the harvest of the truth of the human spirit.

Thus, the first item that was sown in Matthew was the human spirit, and the second was the human heart. These two items were mentioned first because they are the very places for the Lord to sow Himself and then to spread Himself. When the Lord Jesus comes into a person, He enters not the heart but the spirit. As we have pointed out already, 1 Peter 3:4 says that the spirit is the center, the very hub, of our heart. It is the hidden man of the heart. Our heart surrounds our spirit. The spirit is the specific spot where the Lord Jesus enters into a man. From there He is seeking the opportunity to spread into every part of the heart.

The Wayside

In the parable of the sower the people who receive the Lord Jesus are likened to four kinds of earth. The first is the wayside, the margin of the field. This margin or border of the field lies between the field and the road and is somewhat neutral, being neither the road nor the field. Because this kind of earth is close to the road, it has been trodden down by the traffic of the world and has become hardened and preoccupied, making it difficult for the seed to

get in. The birds of the air realize this situation and come immediately to snatch away the seed. When some people listen to the word of the gospel of the kingdom, their hearts are preoccupied by the worldly communication and traffic. They may listen to the message and nod their heads in agreement, but their hearts have been hardened. After the message is over, they retain nothing because the word has been snatched out of their heart. The Lord Jesus told us definitely that the birds in the air signify the evil one, Satan (Matt. 13:4, 19). Satan moves upon the earth, but he dwells in the air. From there he watches over the earth. Satan never sleeps; he is always working on the earth, watching for an opportunity to snatch the word of the kingdom from the hardened hearts. The worldly traffic with all of its complications hardens the hearts of men. We need to pray, "Lord Jesus, keep me from being the wayside. Don't let my heart be hardened by the traffic of this world."

The Rocky Places

Even if your heart is not like the earth by the wayside, do not be confident that you have no problems. There is still the second kind of earth—the rocky places. The Lord Jesus said that the rocky places are covered with soft soil that is apparently very good for growing something. In reality, however, the soil is shallow—perhaps only a half-inch deep. On the surface there is good, soft soil, but underneath are rocks. These rocks do not mainly represent the sinful things, but they represent our natural mind, emotions, and will. Our unrenewed mind, our untouched emotions, and our unsubdued will are three huge rocks in our heart.

For several years I have been traveling, visiting, and ministering in this country. I am very happy to see the growth in life among so many saints during this period of time. However, I am concerned about some of the brothers and sisters, because year after year they seem to have very little growth. We simply cannot see the increase and expansion of the Lord Jesus within them. They may be good, gentle, and nice, but there has been little growth of Christ. The kingdom is not a matter of being nice; it is a matter of having Christ spreading Himself within us. Because of hidden rocks in the heart, the Lord Jesus has not been able to spread in some of the brothers and sisters.

The first rock is the natural mind. We may even call it the religious mind, the doctrinal mind, or the mind filled with Bible knowledge. You may feel that

there is nothing wrong with such a mind, but for the sake of the kingdom it must be broken through. The book of Matthew reveals that it was the people with a religious mind who troubled the Lord Jesus most. Thus, if we are going to have Christ as the seed of the kingdom growing within us, we need to unload our mind, to empty our mind of the old concepts. We must realize that what prevents the Lord Jesus from taking deep root within us is the natural mind underneath the soft soil. Do not read this for others; read it for yourself. If you consider that you have heard this before and understand it already, this also is a rock. You need to pray, "Lord, unload my mind and understanding."

Another large rock is the untreated, undealt-with emotions. If your emotions are very raw and, in a sense, fragile, they have probably never been dealt with or trained by the Lord. If your emotions have been trained and treated by the Lord, you will not be easily offended by other people. You will be flexible but not fragile. Our emotions must be dealt with and treated by the Lord in a deep way. We need to pray that the Lord would deal with our emotions. Some of the problems in the churches are caused by the fragile emotions. Sisters, how about your emotions? If you want to convince a sister about something, it is not necessary to talk much. You simply need to shed two tears, one from each eye. By two tears the sister will be fully persuaded because her emotions are untreated. How we need the Lord to deal with our emotions!

One day the two sons of the high priest, Aaron, were burned to death by the Lord (Lev. 10:1-7). As a father how could Aaron hold back the tears and keep from mourning over his sons? However, Moses charged Aaron not to mourn. We might think that Moses had no human feelings. The fact that Aaron could control his emotions and hold back his tears indicates that he was qualified to be such a high priest. In God's kingdom, in the church life, do not play with your emotions. It is very easy for the sisters to be emotional, to weep, and to shed tears. However, by the Lord's mercy and by His life within us, we can all subdue our emotions and have them thoroughly dealt with. Our emotions must be dug deeply, and the rock of our emotions must be dug away. If we do not deal with our emotions, the Lord cannot take deep root within us. The large rock of our emotions hinders the growth of Christ.

Now we come to the will, a rock even harder than the mind and the emotions. This is perhaps a problem particularly among the brothers. I have seen several strong-willed brothers. Once they have made a decision, nothing

can change them. Of course, some brothers are “wishy-washy,” but most are very strong. Sometimes, the strong-willed brothers would not listen to what the ministry or the elders say. Brothers, your will needs to be broken, crushed, and ground into powder. I hope that eventually the strong-willed brothers will let the Lord deal with their will. Then the church will be rescued. You need to pray, “O Lord, have mercy upon me. Don’t let my heart be hardened by the traffic of the world. Dig out the rocks of my natural mind, emotions, and will. Spread from my spirit into every part of my heart.”

CHAPTER TWELVE

THE MYSTERIES OF THE KINGDOM (2)

Scripture Reading: Matt. 13:24-33; Gal. 1:15a, 16a; 2:20; 4:19; Eph. 3:17a

The Thorny Places

In the last chapter we began to cover the mysteries of the kingdom from Matthew 13. We saw that the Lord Jesus is both the Sower and the seed. As He sowed, some seeds fell beside the way, which was hardened by the traffic of the world. Other seeds fell on rocky places, where stones beneath the surface hindered their growth. Now we come to the next kind of earth, that which is filled with thorns. We should remember that the source of the thorns was the serpent (Gen. 3:18). In Matthew 13:22 the Lord Jesus told us that the thorns represent the anxiety of the age and the deceitfulness of riches. These thorns choke the growth of the Lord Jesus within us. We all are familiar with the anxiety of the age and the deceitfulness of riches.

In the United States it is easy for people to earn a living, but this situation is filled with temptations. These temptations arise from the cooperation between the modern things and our lusts. We need to earn a living in order to maintain our existence on the earth. With this there is no problem. However, Satan is very subtle. God's intention is for us to earn a living, but Satan's subtle design is to choke the growth of Christ within us. If we know the Lord's way, we will be happy to lower our standard of living rather than trying to lift it. We will continually encounter the temptation of raising our standard of living, of wanting better cars and bigger houses. It is an endless cycle of slavery. Satan wants to make us slaves to the standard of living. He will entice us to work harder and longer to make more money and then to occupy more time to spend the money. It is much wiser to simplify our living. This will save us considerable time. There is no need for us to work so hard and to occupy so much time in spending money. The care of this age is really a snare. Do not be trapped by it. Many Christians have fallen into this snare and have been trapped by the anxiety of this age.

On the contrary, many brothers and sisters have been willing to lower their standard of living for the sake of migration. They have sacrificed their

standard of living, and this afforded them a way to migrate to various places. It is not an easy matter to migrate from one city to another. We are the real Hebrews, pilgrims on the earth. We are not settlers or dwellers. If the Lord allows, we will continue to take many more cities by the way of migration. However, if we are always trying to raise our standard of living, we are through with migration. As long as we have food, drink, and clothing, that is sufficient. We are not here for our standard of living; we live on this earth for the Lord's recovery.

In many respects the United States is a good place for the church life. Everything is here. It is quite easy to find a job working eight hours a day, five days a week. This gives us Saturday, the Lord's Day, and all the evenings during the week for the practice of the church life. This is an excellent situation for the church life. However, if you are not for the church life, the American way of living is very dangerous. If you do not have the church life, what will occupy you? What will you do on the weekends and in the evenings? Where will you go? No doubt you will be attracted to various amusements, sports, and nightclubs. All these things will become snares.

We are here for the church life! We praise the Lord that the United States exists for the church life. The United States is not only for the church life in this country but for the spreading of the church life throughout the whole world. Have you ever noticed the strategic geographic location of the United States? The United States is located at the crossroads of the world with two great oceans, the Atlantic and the Pacific, on two sides like the two wings of an eagle. It is easy to move in any direction from the United States: from the Pacific coast we can take care of Asia and the Far East; from the Atlantic coast we can take care of Europe and Africa. We can also take care of North and South America. This is wonderful! This is God's sovereignty. The Lord can never be wrong, and He has chosen the United States for the recovery of the church life.

All the modern conveniences are likewise for the church life. In the last century it took several months to travel from New York to Los Angeles. Now a jet can fly this distance in less than six hours. We are not for the jets; the jets are for us. We are not for this age; this age is for us. We do not need to care for this age. The Lord cares for us, and this age is for us as long as we are for the Lord's recovery. "Seek first His kingdom and His righteousness, and all these things will be added to you" (Matt. 6:33). All the things will be free if we

buy the kingdom. The kingdom costs something; we must pay for it. If we pay the price of the kingdom, our livelihood will be free. The Lord will care for us if we do not care for this age. We should beware of the deceitfulness of riches. Of course, if you care for this age, money will mean much to you and will snare you. If we are free from the anxiety of this age, we will not care for money. We will make money for the sake of the Lord's recovery.

The Good Ground

We are not a cursed field growing thorns; we are a blessed field growing Christ as the real wheat. Our source is not the serpent; our source is the God of life. So we are not cursed; we are blessed. It is the cursed earth whose source is the serpent that produces thorns. We, however, come from another source, from our Father, the God of life. Therefore, we are a field, a farm, much blessed by our Father. We grow Christ, the real wheat. We are not the wayside or the rocky place or the thorny earth. We are the good earth, growing Christ. As we have seen, the seeds are sown in Matthew, and the development of the seeds takes place in the Epistles. If we remember this principle, we will discover much from our reading of the New Testament.

THE DEVELOPMENT OF THE SEED

From Matthew 13 we go on to 1 Corinthians 3. In this chapter Paul clearly states that we are God's cultivated land, that he planted and Apollos watered, and that God causes the growth. This is the development of Matthew 13. First Corinthians 3 shows that in the development of the seed, God's co-workers are planters and waterers. It does not say that Paul taught and Apollos edified and God gave the graduation certificate. In this chapter there is no teacher, but there is a planter. There is no edifier, but there is a waterer. We thank God for the planting, for the watering, and for the growth. This is one side of the development.

Another side is found in Galatians. In Galatians 1:15a and 16a the apostle Paul says, "It pleased God...to reveal His Son in me." This means that God sowed Christ into him. When God the Father reveals His Son in us, He sows Christ into us as the seed of life. In Galatians 2:20 Paul says, "Christ who lives in me." First, Christ is revealed in us; second, Christ lives in us. This indicates growth and development. In Galatians 4:19 Paul says, "Until Christ is formed in you." Christ not only lives in us, but He is being formed in us. To be formed

in us means that Christ becomes fully settled within us. Many times I have used the illustration of a glove. A glove was made to contain a hand. Sometimes it may be difficult to put our hand into a glove in a proper way. We must gradually insert each finger forcibly until it fits exactly into the fingers of the glove. This illustrates Christ living in us and endeavoring to be formed in us. He is waiting for an opportunity to spread into every inward part of our being. When He is able to do this, He will be formed in us.

This will be the reality of Ephesians 3:17, which says, "That Christ may make His home in your hearts." The heart is composed of the mind, the will, the emotions, and the conscience. At the center of our heart is our spirit. Christ is in the center, awaiting the opportunity to spread out of our spirit into our mind, emotions, and will. Then Christ will settle Himself in every part of our heart. This means that Christ makes His home in our heart, occupying and possessing our whole being. This is the spreading of the indwelling Christ. The spreading of the indwelling Christ is simply the growing of the seed of life within us.

Although we may have previously heard about the increase of Christ within us, we perhaps did not realize that this increase within us is simply the growth of the kingdom. The increase of Christ within us is both the growth of the kingdom and also the gradual coming of the kingdom. The kingdom comes by the growth of Christ. As the indwelling Christ is spreading and growing within our inward parts, the kingdom is coming. Even now the kingdom is coming, although somewhat slowly due to the condition of our soul-life. If we will render the Lord more adequate cooperation, the speed of the coming of the kingdom will increase.

Many think that the kingdom of God will come automatically and that we can sleep while we wait for it to appear. If you take this way, you will sleep for two thousand years and still the kingdom will not come. The kingdom does not come in such a way. According to the revelation of the Bible, the kingdom comes by the growing process of the indwelling Christ. When the indwelling Christ grows in us, it means that the kingdom has gained more ground. The full coming of the kingdom will be the maturity of the growth of Christ. The maturity of the growth of Christ within us is the coming of the kingdom. We are waiting for the coming of the kingdom in a growing way. While we are waiting, we are growing. While we are growing, the kingdom is coming, for our growing is the coming of the kingdom.

THE TARES

There are three other parables found in Matthew 13: the parables of the tares, the mustard seed, and the leaven. These three parables, along with the parable of the sower, form one group. They are all related to the vegetable life and to farming. In the first parable the sower sows the seed. In the second parable the tares appear, also growing on the farm. In the third parable there is a mustard seed growing in the field. In the fourth parable meal is made from the grains of wheat produced by the field. Therefore, these four parables concern one growth. They are related to one another and should not be separated.

We have seen that God's intention is to sow Christ into us as life so that He can grow within us. This growth process is the coming of the kingdom. However, Satan, God's enemy, never sleeps. He is always busy. Once he saw that God's farm was growing wheat, he came in to sow false seed, the tares (vv. 24-30). Prior to this, he had already caused considerable damage. First, he was likened to a bird, snatching away the seed from the wayside. Praise the Lord that some seed was sown into the field. Yet underneath some of the earth were rocks—the unrenewed mind, emotions, and will. These are Satan-saturated elements in our being. The Satan-saturated mind, will, and emotions are hard rocks beneath the soil. Outwardly, Satan was unable to snatch away the word, but inwardly, he held to the mind, emotions, and will, causing them to be huge rocks. Then Satan worked to produce thorns, causing the anxiety of this life, the love for money, and the deceitfulness of riches to choke the growth of Christ. This indicates that Satan, the subtle one, is constantly busy. He snatches away the seed, he hardens people, and he causes thorns to spring up. However, regardless of all the damage that Satan could do, God still gained the victory. There was some good ground, which produced wheat.

After this, Satan came in to sow false seed, the tares, into the field. Many years ago I read an article which said that even an expert cannot tell the difference between tares and wheat until the blade appears. In other words, it is only after the fruit appears that anyone can discern between the wheat and the tares. The tares resemble the wheat in every aspect. The difference is clearly evident only after the fruit appears. The genuine wheat brings forth the ears; the tares produce something else, something false. At that time it is easy to tell the difference between tares and wheat. Satan was very subtle to

produce the counterfeit, false Christians, and plant them among the genuine Christians to confuse the situation and frustrate the growth. We all must be alert. Satan sowed the tares while men slept, meaning they were not alert. In all the churches we must be alert, making it difficult for Satan to sow the false seed. Satan himself will never sleep. Regardless of how good a church is, he will attempt to sow the false seed, to grow something that closely resembles the real thing. This will choke and frustrate the growth of the real wheat and will confuse the condition of God's farm. We must be careful. Some people may make a certain suggestion, and this may be a sign that they are tares and not real wheat. When they first appeared, they had the same appearance as everyone else. Even an expert could not discern whether they were genuine or false until the day that they made a certain suggestion. Then some began to realize that they might be tares. In the churches the leading ones must be especially alert not to be cheated by tares. Satan will try to sow tares to cause confusion, frustration, and damage, and to hinder the growth of the real wheat. We must be careful of anyone who suggests something that will frustrate the growth of the wheat. That may be the sign of a tare.

THE MUSTARD SEED

Now we come to the parable of the mustard seed (vv. 31-32). The Lord Jesus said that the mustard seed is the smallest of the seeds, yet it grows into a great tree. Although it may not be readily apparent, this also is damage caused by Satan. According to Genesis 1, all the vegetables are to reproduce according to their kind, and the animals according to their kind. For example, a peach tree should bring forth according to its kind, and an apple tree should bring forth according to its kind. Therefore, an herb should be according to its kind, and a tree should be according to its kind. However, in this parable we see something that grows not according to its kind—an herb becomes a tree. This is growth out of proportion and growth that breaks the regulation of the life law. With every kind of life there is the life essence, the life power, the life shape, and the life law. We have the confidence that if a peach sprout grows, it will become a peach tree, it will attain the height of a normal peach tree, and it will bring forth peaches. We do not need to be concerned that the peach tree might grow into another kind of tree and not produce peaches. This is impossible, for within the peach sprout is the peach life, and within the peach life are the peach essence and the peach law, which regulate its development. According to its law of life, the peach sprout will grow into a peach tree and will bring forth peaches.

A Great Tree

The mustard herb, however, grew into a great tree. The shape, nature, and form were changed; it broke the law of life and grew out of proportion. This represents Christendom. Christendom has become a great tree. According to its nature, a mustard herb is small and good for food. But this herb grew out of proportion and became a great tree with many evil birds lodging in its branches. As such, it was no longer good for food. Earlier in the same chapter, the Lord Jesus told us the interpretation of the birds, saying that they were the devil and his angels. Many evil spirits lodge in Christendom today. The branches have become the lodging place of demons. This should not be a mere doctrine to us; we must have the practical application.

Growing out of Proportion

The mustard herb became a great tree by breaking the life law and growing out of proportion. What does this mean? Many Christians are ambitious to be great. To desire to be great is very dangerous because it can break the law of life. We thank the Lord that the move of His recovery in this country has been growing gradually throughout the years. When we conducted the training on the Psalms in 1969, we had seven hundred attendants. In 1972 we had close to twenty-two hundred, more than three times the number in 1969. This has been the proper growth. Although it has been rather slow, it is nevertheless the normal growth. During the past years we have been growing slowly because we do not like to have a big work. Therefore, we do not use propaganda and advertisements. Recently, a reporter from a newspaper contacted one of the brothers, wanting to give us some advertisement and publicity. The brother told the reporter that we do not like to be advertised. We prefer to remain hidden. We are a little mustard herb; we do not want to be a great tree. According to the natural human concept, it is good to be a mushroom, growing up overnight. A mushroom grows up overnight, but it also disappears overnight. Anything that comes fast will also go fast. You can be sure of this. Let us seek the growth in the proper proportion according to the law of life, growth that is according to its kind. We do not want growth that is out of proportion and not according to its kind. We will not rise up fast; neither will we go down fast. We must grow according to the law of life and be according to our kind, in the proper proportion. I advise you never to use any advertisement. If you are going to get a name, it is better to have a bad name. Let people speak about you in an evil way. Do not display your best points to

people. If people come to examine you, let them find out your weak points. We have always practiced this because we do not want to be great. We desire to remain a little mustard herb and never become a great tree. In the Lord's recovery we have no giants. If anyone comes to your locality asking who is your minister, you should tell him that everyone is a minister. Even the little sisters are ministers. We do not have a great leader; we are the little mustard herbs.

Good for Food

Mustard herbs are good for food. The whole world is hungry. The hungry world does not need a great tree; it needs a little mustard herb to feed people, to satisfy the hunger in all the human beings. Let all the local churches be small; even if we have a large number, we should be small in nature. We should always maintain the law of life and never grow out of proportion.

THE LEAVEN

The parable of the leaven is next. As an evil bird, Satan snatches away the word, produces hard rocks under the soil, causes thorns to choke the growth of life, sows confusion by planting tares, and causes the growth out of proportion. All these things are Satan's work to ruin or retard the proper growth of life in God's field. Yet God is victorious! Some grain is still produced. Therefore, we have the meal, the fine flour. Regardless of how much Satan attempts to frustrate God's farm, it still produces the meal, which is good for making a loaf. Of course, the grains first must be ground, blended, and cooked.

At this point Satan came in again to damage the meal by adding leaven. In both the Old and New Testaments leaven signifies an evil, corrupting element. If we study leaven in the Bible, we will see that it represents the satanic, sinful, worldly, and fleshly things.

A Mixture

In this parable there is the meal, the leaven, and the woman. This woman in Matthew 13 signifies the Roman Catholic Church. She is also Jezebel, the woman mentioned in Revelation 2. This evil woman, the great harlot, added leaven to the fine flour, producing a mixture of the real and the false, the good

and the bad, the elements of Christ and the elements of Satan. In Christendom you can see some real things and some false things, some holy things and some worldly things, some elements of Christ and some elements of Satan, all mixed together. In the Roman Catholic Church and in all the denominations, there are many real Christians, yet there is also much leaven. The Roman Catholic Church has picked up many pagan things and mixed them with the things of Christ. For example, did you know that the origin of Christmas is pagan? Christmas Day, December 25, celebrated the birthday of the sun god. The Roman Catholic Church took in this pagan holiday, making December 25 the birthday of Christ. Many Christians argue that Christmas is an excellent time to preach the gospel because they can take the opportunity to preach Christ while people celebrate Christmas. This is leaven and is the subtlety of the enemy. Easter is also a leaven. When the Catholic Church went to China, it even embraced ancestor worship. Not only in the Roman Catholic Church but also in the denominations, there are many worldly things and lusts added to the things of Christ to produce a mixture. Our eyes need to be opened to see this mixture.

We are against the birds of the air. We are against the rocks underneath the soft earth. We are against the thorns, and we are against the tares. We are against the disproportionate growth of the great tree, and we are also against the leaven. We oppose anything that corrupts. This is a matter of the Lord's recovery and of the Lord's kingdom. These parables are the mysteries of the kingdom.

CHAPTER THIRTEEN

THE MYSTERIES OF THE KINGDOM (3)

Scripture Reading: Matt. 13:44-50; Exo. 19:5; Psa. 135:4; 1 Cor. 10:32; Acts 20:28

The parables in Matthew 13 are concerning the mysteries of the kingdom. This does not mean that these mysteries are not reality. In fact, these mysteries are themselves the reality. The difference is that this reality was presented by the Lord Jesus to His disciples in a mysterious way and not in an open way. He presented the mysteries of the kingdom in such a way that only those who have a heart after God's desire can understand them. Those who are indifferent toward God's interests will find the parables very difficult to understand.

In Matthew 13:11-15 the Lord Jesus told the disciples why He used parables as the means to reveal the mysteries of the kingdom. He spoke in parables because the religious leaders, although apparently very religious and for God, were actually indifferent toward God's interests. They had the forms and the appearance of seeking God but not the reality. They were not sincerely concerned about God's desire.

Previous to this time, in Matthew 12:46-50, the mother and brothers of the Lord Jesus came to see Him, wanting to speak with Him. When the Lord Jesus learned of this, He asked, "Who is My mother, and who are My brothers?" He considered His brothers and sisters not according to their flesh but according to their concern for the will of God. Whoever is concerned for the will of God is His brother and sister and mother. This indicates that by the time of Matthew 12, the Lord Jesus had given up the Jewish people. According to the flesh, the Jews are the Lord's brothers. However, at the end of Matthew 12, the Lord Jesus gave up that relationship. No longer did He have a relationship with anyone according to the flesh. Henceforth, His relationships would be in the Spirit and related to the will of God. Because the Jewish people cared only for the forms and appearance, with no care for God's concern, the Lord Jesus gave them up. After this, He began to speak about the reality of the kingdom in parables, not in an open way but in a mysterious way.

Throughout the past centuries of Christian history, these parables have not been fully understood. During the first year after I was saved, I began to read the book of Matthew. As a young Christian, I was very ambitious to know the Bible thoroughly. So I decided to write down every verse I did not understand, and eventually, I had too many verses. Because of this, I purchased some books, especially on Matthew 13. Some taught that we are the ones who purchased the field (v. 44). They gave a reference of Philippians 3:7-8, indicating that we must sell everything in order to buy the field.

Other books indicated that the great tree was something positive (Matt. 13:32). These books said that, at the beginning, Christianity was like a little seed sown by the Lord Jesus, but now, in its greatness, it has become something marvelous and magnificent. This kind of interpretation indicates that their eyes were blinded. In this very chapter the Lord Jesus gave us the interpretation of the birds, telling us that they were Satan and his evil angels (v. 19). These evil spirits, the birds, lodge in the great tree. It is the birds of the air, not the Triune God or the saints, that lodge in the branches of the great tree. This proves that the great tree is connected to Satan. How, then, can we regard the great tree in a positive sense? The church is the dwelling place of God, where God makes His home. The great tree, however, is different. The church can be compared to the vine tree of John 15 but not to that great tree of Matthew 13. The vine tree is not useful for producing material goods. Have you ever seen furniture or a house built out of a vine tree? The vine tree is good for producing grapes and wine—something to eat and drink. Likewise, the church must be small, not a great structure but full of something to eat and drink. The fact that the evil birds lodge in the branches of the great tree proves that this tree is something negative.

Others indicated that the leaven also was good and positive, saying that if bread does not contain leaven, it is difficult for people to eat. This is correct. However, according to Leviticus 2:4, God did not allow any leaven to be added to the meal offering. The meal offering had to be unleavened. Catholicism excuses its use of leaven by saying that it is difficult for people to take Christ if leaven is absent. Catholicism claims that people will not accept the simple truth of the birth of the Lord Jesus or the resurrection of Christ without the leaven of Christmas and Easter. Christ is the meal; “mas” is the leaven. Christmas is Christ plus “mas,” that is, the meal plus the leaven. The resurrection of Christ plus the leaven becomes Easter.

I have visited Catholic cathedrals in the Philippines to study the situation. At the side of the entrance to the cathedral, I found an idol of Jesus. I debated with them, saying, “The Bible says clearly that we should never make any images, any idols. Why do you make an image of Jesus?” They argued back, replying, “Without an image of Jesus, it is difficult for people to have some realization of Jesus. We put up such an image so that everyone can have some impression of Him as they come in.” This is evil leaven. Perhaps you still have some portraits of Jesus in your home that make Him appear beautiful or handsome. The Bible says that the Lord Jesus had no attracting form or beautiful appearance (Isa. 53:2). Many Christians, not realizing the leaven involved, have such pictures of Jesus in their homes.

In 1936, while ministering in the central part of China, I met a young sister who had become possessed by a demon as a result of worshipping a picture of Jesus. Whenever she prayed, she knelt down before that picture and prayed to it. When she destroyed that picture of Jesus, she was delivered from the demon.

The clergy-laity system is also a kind of leaven. Every Christian is a member of the Body of Christ, and as a member he must function. But what is the situation today? In the so-called Christian service most of the Christians are silent while one man ministers to them. This is the clergy-laity system. People attempt to excuse themselves, saying that today is an age of science, that not everyone knows the Bible and not everyone can deliver a sermon. According to the advocates of the clergy-laity system, not everyone knows how to serve God. Therefore, some must go to seminary to learn the art and technique of serving God, just as others go to medical school to learn the practice of medicine and others to law school to learn how to be an attorney. The defenders of this system argue that many Christians lack the time to learn the things of God and that they do not know how to minister or speak. Thus, some must dedicate themselves, study at the seminaries and Bible schools, and go to serve God. This appears to be a good excuse, but actually it is leaven, helping people to serve God in an easy way.

Because many of you were born and have grown up in Christianity, you were deeply influenced. Whenever you come to a meeting of the church, you are still under the unconscious or subconscious influence of the leaven of the clergy-laity system. You think that the meeting must be conducted by some leading ones and that all you need to do is sit, listen, watch, and discern.

Eventually, you learn to be critical. When you come to the meeting, do you have the burden or desire or concept that you must function in the meeting? I am afraid that many of you do not have this realization. Your concept is that someone else will do it. This is some of the leaven which that woman took and hid in the fine meal.

In the Bible leaven is always something negative. It may help, but in a negative way. If we have an open and sincere heart with a genuine concern for God's will, then He will give us a spirit of wisdom and revelation to see all these things. By His mercy He has shown us the real meaning of all the figures in these parables. In the first four parables of Matthew 13, there are six positive things: the sower, the seed, the good ground, the wheat, the mustard herb, and the meal. The sower is the Lord Jesus, who came to sow Himself as the seed into the good ground. The good ground grows wheat, and it also grows the mustard herb. Both the wheat and the mustard herb are good for food. The mustard herb is food for man; the wheat is food not only for man but also for God, because wheat was used in making the loaf presented to God in the meal offering. In 1 Corinthians 10 we also see a loaf made of wheat. That is the bread at the Lord's table—food for both God and man. The church must be like this, a mustard herb and wheat for producing fine flour to provide food for both God and man, satisfying both God and man.

In these four parables there are also several negative things: the birds in the air, the rocks, the thorns, the tares, the great tree, the leaven, the woman, and the evil one. We all must be clear about these items. The birds represent the evil one, Satan. The rocks signify the unrenewed mind, the untreated emotions, and the unsubdued will. The thorns signify the anxieties of this age and the deceitfulness of riches. The tares signify the counterfeit Christians. The great tree represents today's Christendom. The leaven is all manner of paganism, worldliness, sinfulness, and idolatry. The woman signifies the Roman Catholic Church, even Christendom, and the evil one is Satan himself. Bring all these items to the Lord and pray over them until they become transparently clear to you. This will become the greatest rescue and safeguard to you.

THE TREASURE, THE PEARL, AND THE NET

Now we come to the three remaining parables in Matthew 13: the treasure, the pearl, and the net. This will make a total of seven parables. In the Bible

the number seven is composed of four plus three, three plus four, and six plus one. The number seven in Matthew 13 is firstly composed of four plus three. The first four parables comprise one group, and the last three comprise another. The first instance of the number seven found in the Bible was composed of six plus one: in Genesis 1 and 2 there are six days for God's work and one day for God's rest. Whenever we have six plus one, it means that God has a completion for His rest. The number seven in these parables is composed both ways. First it is composed of four plus three; then it is composed of six plus one. The last parable, the parable of the net, stands alone. When the time of this parable will have been fulfilled, that will be the completion, the consummation of the age. Then God will have rest.

In Revelation 6 and 8 there are seven seals, the first four seals plus the last three. Also, there are six seals plus one seal, for the completion follows the seventh seal. At that time the wrath of God will come. The same principle applies to the seven trumpets in Revelation 8, 9, and 11. First, there are four trumpets and then three trumpets. There are also six trumpets plus the last trumpet. When the last trumpet sounds, God's wrath is manifested. When the seventh parable of Matthew 13 is finished, that signifies the completion for God's rest. This parable includes the phrase *the consummation of the age*. This indicates that the seventh parable is the consummation. When this parable is consummated, that will be the time for God's rest.

The Treasure and the Pearl

Each of the four parables in the first group contains something related to the vegetable life. The two parables following—the treasure hidden in the field and the pearl—are both related to minerals. The treasure certainly must contain either precious stones or gold, both of which are minerals. The pearl also is a type of mineral since its basic structure, a tiny rock, is a mineral.

Three Peoples

There is a great deal involved here. The Lord Jesus is very wise, and the parables, although they are simple, contain great wisdom. Taken as a group, the last three parables cover the whole human race. The human race is composed of three peoples: the Jews, the church, and the Gentiles. First Corinthians 10:32 reveals that among the human race today there are only

these three peoples—the Jews, the church, and the Gentiles, represented by *Greeks*.

Two Worlds

In the eyes of God, there are only two worlds: one signified in the Bible by the earth, the other signified by the sea. The Gentiles belong to the sea-world, and the Jews belong to the earth-world. Both Daniel 7 and Revelation 13 reveal that the Gentile world is a world of the sea. The treasure hidden in the field, that is, in the earth, refers to the kingdom with Israel. The pearl refers to the church. Thus, the treasure is the kingdom, and the pearl is the church. Both are eventually for the kingdom. The fish drawn out of the sea in an unregenerate condition, some good and some bad, represent the Gentiles. This parable refers to the conclusion of the Gentile world at the end of the age. When the Lord Jesus returns, there will be the Jewish people, the church, and the Gentiles. The real Jewish people are a treasure in the eyes of God. The church is a pearl in His eyes. The remainder of humanity, the Gentile world, are classified as the fish of the sea. At the end of the age, the angels will gather them to the Lord Jesus, and He will exercise His judgment upon them.

The Church

If the Jewish people are represented by the earth and the Gentiles are represented by the sea, where is the church? The church is neither of the earth nor in the water but something that came out of the water. A pearl is formed by an oyster living in the death waters, in the world of death. A small rock enters into the oyster, hurting it and wounding it. The oyster then secretes a life-juice that covers the rock. This secretion of the life-juice over the tiny rock produces a pearl. The pearl is then taken out of the water as something precious. We can all see the spiritual meaning of this parable. The living oyster refers to the Lord Jesus who came into the waters of death. We are the little rock that wounded Him. After wounding Him, we stayed at the cross, remaining at His wound. Then His resurrection life was secreted, covering us again and again and making us a pearl. We have been taken out of the water, and we belong neither to the earth nor to the water. Thus, we are a people acquired for a possession (1 Pet. 2:9). We are a people who belong neither to the earth nor to the sea. We are pearls that have been taken out of the waters of death.

A Personal Treasure

When God brought the people of Israel out of Egypt to Mount Sinai, He told Moses that He would take them as His personal treasure from among all the peoples (Exo. 19:5). Psalm 135:4 also tells us that God chose Israel to be His own personal treasure. These verses prove that in God's eyes the Jews are a personal treasure to Him. In Matthew 13:44 the treasure is mentioned again, showing that the Jews, as God's treasure, are also a part of the kingdom. This parable says that a treasure was hidden in a field, that a man found it, and after finding it, he hid it and sold all that he had to buy the field. The Lord Jesus is the man who came and found the treasure and then hid it. He first presented the kingdom to the Jewish people, but because they rejected Him, the Lord hid it, concealing it from the unbelieving Jews. After discovering and hiding the treasure, the Lord Jesus went to the cross to sell all that He had to buy not only the treasure but the whole field. He redeemed the whole earth for the sake of the treasure. The treasure in the field signifies the kingdom with the true Israel. In Revelation 21 and 22 the New Jerusalem contains not only the names of the twelve apostles but also the names of the twelve tribes of Israel. There are precious stones and pearls, representing Israel and the church.

God has gained some people from the Jewish race for His possession. He has also gained some people from the Gentile world. Through the death and resurrection of Christ and through the secretion of the life of Christ, these people from the Gentile world have become the pearl. God has put these two peoples together to produce a city, the New Jerusalem, which is composed of the precious stones and the pearls.

The Net

What about the remainder of the Gentile world? When the Lord Jesus comes back, many of them still will not be Christians. The Lord knows how to take care of them. He will send His angels to gather them all to Him, and He will exercise judgment over them. This is the significance of the parable of the net, and this will complete the Lord's dealing with the human race. After this judgment God will be able to rest.

FROM A SEED TO A PEARL

These parables of the mysteries of the kingdom show us that the Lord Jesus came as a Sower to sow the seed and that eventually He gained a pearl. The pearl comes out of the seed. Christ is the seed, and the church is the pearl. No wonder the Lord Jesus sold all that He had to buy the pearl! We should not think that we are the seller or the buyer. We are poor and cannot pay; neither do we have anything to sell. The pearl is too precious, and the price is too great. The Lord Jesus paid the price, selling all that He had to buy the church. Acts 20:28 reveals that the Lord Jesus purchased the church with His own blood. He bought the church by paying such a high price. The Lord Jesus sowed Himself as the seed, and eventually He will receive a pearl. What a joy this will be to the Lord!

GROWTH AND TRANSFORMATION

If we examine Matthew 13, we will notice two things. First is growth; the seed needs to grow. As we pointed out previously, Paul planted, Apollos watered, and God caused the growth (1 Cor. 3:6). The second thing is transformation. The pearl is not an item of God's original creation; it is a transformed piece of sand. In itself the sand is not precious, but it is covered and transformed by the secretion of a precious element. Transformation is not self-correction or a mere outward change. It is a metabolic change that results from a new element being added into us. At one time, we were all little rocks. Then the resurrection life of Christ was added to us. Again and again the resurrection element was secreted over us, producing a change in life. This is transformation. In this one chapter of Matthew, we see both growth and transformation. We need to experience growth and transformation day by day. In the next chapter we will see that growth and transformation are always accompanied by the building. Eventually, there are not many pearls but one great pearl. This signifies one entity comprised of many who have been built together into oneness. This is the building. Thus, we have growth, transformation, and building.

With the seed, the wheat, and the meal, there is the possibility for the evil one to damage by bringing in something negative and corrupting. But with the pearl and the treasure, Satan can do nothing. In the parables of the treasure and pearl, Satan is not mentioned. Whenever there is transformation in a church, Satan is finished. Satan can do nothing against the New Jerusalem. At that time, he will be in the lake of fire. The principle is the same today. If the church is transformed, Satan will be jobless. If our growth

remains at the stage of the seed, the wheat, or the meal, Satan will have many opportunities to damage and frustrate. However, when we are transformed, Satan will be finished. He will be unable to inject any more leaven. We need growth, and even more, we need transformation.

We are not only wheat and meal; eventually, we become the pearls. First, we are the vegetables; by growth and transformation we become the minerals. According to the revelation of the Bible, the precious stones and pearls are for God's building. The building comes from growth and transformation. For the building, the vegetable life is insufficient—we need the minerals. We need the treasure and the pearl.

CHAPTER FOURTEEN

GROWTH, TRANSFORMATION, AND BUILDING

Scripture Reading: John 1:42; Matt. 16:18-19; 18:17-18; 21:42; Acts 4:11-12; 1 Pet. 2:2, 4-5, 7; Rev. 22:1-2

Most of the truths in the New Testament were sown as seeds in the book of Matthew. In Matthew 13 we have the seeds for growth and transformation, both of which are for building. In 16:16 Peter recognized that the Lord Jesus was the Christ, the Son of the living God. After Peter made this declaration, the Lord seemed to say, "You have recognized that I am the Christ, the Son of God, but I must tell you something more. It is not sufficient for you to know Me. You must realize that you are a stone and that I will build My church with you as a stone." Matthew includes most of the basic points in the New Testament. It gives us the seed of growth, transformation, and building. All these items are not only related to the church but also to the kingdom. Matthew 16:18-19 reveals that the Lord Jesus used the terms *church* and *kingdom* interchangeably. "I will build My church...I will give to you the keys of the kingdom of the heavens." The church is the kingdom, and the kingdom is the church. The church, which the Lord Jesus builds up with living stones, is the kingdom.

A STONE FOR THE BUILDING

The book of Matthew portrays the Lord Jesus as the wonderful One who has come to sow Himself as the seed of life into us. After the sowing of the seed, there is growth, transformation, and building. The building is the building of the church, which is the kingdom. John 1:42 tells us about the first time that Peter came to the Lord Jesus. When his brother, Andrew, brought him to the Lord, the Lord did not teach him or instruct him; rather, He changed his name from Simon to Cephas. In a sense, this was a prophecy. The Lord prophesied to Simon that he would be called Cephas. Both *Cephas* and *Peter* mean a "stone."

The incident recorded in Matthew 16 occurred about two years after Peter's first meeting with the Lord in John 1:42. When Peter confessed that He was the Christ, the Son of the living God, the Lord reminded him, "You are a

stone." It was not sufficient for Peter to know that He was the Christ and the Son of God. He also needed to realize that he himself was a stone for the building. The Lord was going to build the kingdom. He would build Peter into the church and give him the keys of the kingdom of the heavens. According to the book of Acts, Peter used at least two keys. He used one key on the day of Pentecost to open the door for the Jewish people to enter into the kingdom of the heavens (2:38-42). He used the other key in the house of Cornelius to open the door for the Gentiles to come into the kingdom (10:34-48). The keys were given to Peter and also the authority to bind and loose was committed to him. "Whatever you bind on the earth shall have been bound in the heavens, and whatever you loose on the earth shall have been loosed in the heavens" (Matt. 16:19). Thus, Peter was given two keys and also the authority to bind and loose.

BINDING AND LOOSING

I am very happy that Matthew 18:17-18 is in the Bible. The Roman Catholic Church says that the pope, as Peter's successor, has the sole authority to bind and loose. However, the local church is mentioned in Matthew 18. If you have a problem that two or three believers cannot settle, you should bring this problem to the church. The church here certainly must be the local church. It cannot be the universal church. If the church in Matthew 18 is the universal church, where shall we find it when we have a problem that two or three believers cannot solve? The church in Matthew 18 is surely the local church, and the local church has the authority to bind and loose. In Matthew 16:19 the Lord Jesus told Peter that he had the authority to bind and loose, but in Matthew 18:18 the Lord changed the subject from singular to plural. Matthew 16:19 says, "Whatever you (singular, Gk.) bind," and Matthew 18:18 says, "Whatever you (plural, Gk.) bind." This means that we too have the power to bind and to loose. The authority that Peter had, we also have. Have you seen your position? Have you seen your authority and rank? We all can bind and loose, just as Peter did. Peter was a stone, and we also are stones. Peter had authority to bind and loose, and we also have this authority.

FROM CLAY TO STONE

Many Christians have not seen the authority and the position that have been committed to them. However, if we are going to realize our position and authority, we must be transformed. We were pieces of clay; we must become

stones. By nature as a human being, Simon was clay, but the Lord Jesus changed his life and transformed his being. The Lord Jesus not only changed Simon's name, but He also transformed his being into a stone. In the New Jerusalem there is a foundation stone with Peter's name on it (Rev. 21:14). He is no longer a piece of clay; he has become a foundation stone. Peter in the four Gospels was clay, often taking the lead in making mistakes. But if you read the New Testament carefully, you will see that this muddy Peter was under the process of transformation. In Acts 1 Peter was no longer muddy; he had become a piece of transparent, precious stone. In the four Gospels Peter was somewhat opaque, but when he stood up in Acts 1, he was transparent.

ONENESS BY THE SPIRIT

Some Christians insist upon the so-called Pentecostal experiences, saying that without them we cannot have the Holy Spirit. How about Peter? Before Pentecost had actually arrived, Peter was transparent. He was so bold, strong, and positive, remaining in Jerusalem with one hundred and twenty, praying for ten days in one accord (v. 14). One hundred and twenty people prayed for ten days in one accord without dissenting or disputing. Do you doubt that they had the Holy Spirit? Without the Holy Spirit they could not have done it. They were Galileans who had given up their own country and were staying in Jerusalem in spite of the threatenings of the Jews. One hundred and twenty people prayed for ten days in one accord! If they did not have the Spirit, I am afraid they would have begun to fight after only ten hours. Their being in one accord and continuing in prayer indicates that they had the Spirit within them before the day of Pentecost.

TRANSFORMATION

Peter received a new name, signifying a new element, and a new being. He was transformed. To be transformed is not simply to be changed outwardly; it is to have a new element added into your being. Transformation brings in a new element and eliminates the old element. To be transformed is to be both charged and discharged. We all need to be charged with Christ, just as a transformer is charged with electricity. When Christ is charged into us, He will discharge many old things. In this way we will be renewed and transformed. Transformation is not merely to have an outward change or correction. In the process of transformation a new element is added to replace the old. As this process continues, we become new and transformed. This is

exactly what Peter experienced; the old clay Simon was discharged, and Peter became a precious stone.

In the local churches today we are all under the process of transformation. Day by day Christ is charging Himself into us, and He is discharging and carrying away all the old elements. This process of charging and discharging is transformation. Throughout the past years I have seen some amount of transformation, especially with the young people. Many young people in the local churches have been transformed without regulation or outward correction. Although no one tried to teach them or change them, they were transformed. Some new elements of Christ have been charged into them, causing a discharge of the old elements.

BUILDING

The transformation is for the building. In Matthew 13 we see the sower, the seed, the growth, and the transformation. The vegetables are transformed into minerals. Although we are wheat, we can become precious stones and pearls by transformation. Both precious stones and pearls are transformed items.

In Matthew 13 we cannot see the purpose of growth and transformation. For this, we need to proceed to Matthew 16. In this chapter we find a very significant statement: "You are a stone" (v. 18, Gk.). It is not sufficient just to recognize that the Lord Jesus is the Christ. We must also realize that we are stones. It is very good that we know Christ, but we must also know ourselves. Sisters, are you stones? I am afraid that tomorrow morning you may find that it is very easy to shed some tears. When you are about to cry, you should remind yourself that you are a stone.

Furthermore, a stone will never lose its temper. Brothers, are you stones? What will you do if your wife gives you a difficult time tomorrow morning? Will you lose your temper? If you lose your temper, it indicates that, at least to a certain extent, you are not yet a stone—you are still clay.

LIVING STONES

The Lord Jesus told Peter twice that he was a stone (John 1:42; Matt. 16:18). Evidently, he never forgot it because when Peter wrote his first Epistle, he not

only said that Christ was a living stone but also that all who come to Him are living stones to be built up as a spiritual house for God (2:4-5). The Lord reminded Peter that he was a stone, and later Peter reminded us that we are stones.

GROWTH BY THE PURE WORD

Matthew 13 tells us about the need for growth. First Peter 2 also tells us that we need to grow. As newborn babes we should long for the guileless milk of the word in order that we may grow and become the living stones. We can become living stones by growing because transformation is included in the process of growth. If we consider the verses in 1 Peter 2, we will realize that both growth and transformation are found there. If there is no transformation with the growth, how can one who longs for milk be a living stone? To be sure, the ones who long for milk are not yet living stones. However, after drinking the milk of the word, they will grow and be transformed into living stones for the building. Again we have growth, transformation, and building. In Matthew 13 we have growth and transformation; in Matthew 16 we have the building. We are stones, and the Lord is building us into the church, which is the kingdom. The builded church has authority, and the gates of Hades, signifying the power of Satan, cannot prevail against it. This is the church, a building of transformed materials.

THE LOCAL CHURCH

We all must see what the kingdom is. It is not only a dispensation or a sphere. The kingdom is the building up of regenerated, transformed persons. This building is accomplished in the local church. The builded church of Matthew 16 becomes the local church of Matthew 18. We cannot separate these two chapters. What is built in Matthew 16 is the local church found in Matthew 18. Some say that the church is only universal. If so, where is the universal church? The universal church is the totality of all the local churches, even as a body is the totality of all its members. If there are no members, there is no body. The universal church does not exist by itself; it is a composition of all the local churches. Those who talk only about the universal church are afraid of being built up together with others in the local church. As stones, we must be built into the local church.

BUILT UP WITH OTHERS

The Lord reminded Peter that he was a stone for the building up of the church. He was not built up in the universal church in a general way but practically in the church at Jerusalem. Do not say that you are just in the church. In which local church are you being built up? Do not say that you are just a member of the Body of Christ. You must have a location. Once you are located, you are no longer a wandering star (Jude 13). We must have a location, and we must be built. Once we are located, we have a good opportunity to be built in. First we are located; then we are built in. Migration is wonderful, but do not move from city to city. We must be able to declare to the whole universe that we have been located and that we are now being built into a particular local church. We must not only be in Matthew 16 in the universal church but also in Matthew 18 in the local church.

Growth, transformation, and building occur simultaneously. We should not think that these are three distinct stages. Although it may sound logical to say that growth, transformation, and building are three separate stages, this is not true according to the spiritual life in the church and the kingdom. Growth, transformation, and building progress together. The more you grow, the more you are transformed; the more you are transformed, the more you are built up. The amount of transformation depends on the amount of growth, and the amount of building depends on the amount of transformation.

THE NEED FOR GROWTH IN LIFE

In the coming years the Lord will increase both the number of churches and also the number of saints in the churches. More and more saints will be added to the local churches, and more and more churches will be built up. May the Lord make us very clear that the local churches in the Lord's recovery are absolutely different from today's Christianity. Christianity is composed mainly of formalism or Fundamentalism or Pentecostalism. Formalism stresses correct forms; Fundamentalism emphasizes teachings and doctrines; Pentecostalism emphasizes the gifts. However, in the local churches we need one unique thing—the growth in life. We do not need other things. Although people may have been helped by formalism, Fundamentalism, or Pentecostalism, the subtle enemy will do his best to prevent them from proceeding further than these three things. We all must see that the Lord's recovery primarily needs the growth in life. Although we may have received some help from formalism, Fundamentalism, or Pentecostalism, we must

proceed further to seek the growth in life. Only the growth in life can bring us to the goal.

THE ONE STREET OF LIFE

The New Jerusalem faces four directions—north, south, east, and west. This city has twelve gates, three in each direction (Rev. 21:13), and only one street, the street of life. It does not matter from which direction you came or through which gate you entered into the city. Once you are in the New Jerusalem, you will find yourself on the street of life. There are no streets of doctrine, of formalism, of gifts, or of tongues. There is one unique street—the street of life. The essence of this street is life. On this street can be found the water of life, the river of life, and the tree of life (22:1-2). Whatever proceeds along this street is related to life. You may have entered this city through the gate of formalism or Fundamentalism or Pentecostalism, but once you are truly in the New Jerusalem, you will be on the street of life. There is no other street.

If the local churches have any streets other than life, we will lose the nature of the local church, and there will be divisions. If we fail to emphasize life, we will repeat the history of Christianity, which is a story of divisions and of many streets. The Presbyterians travel the Presbyterian street; the Baptists travel the Baptist street; the Pentecostals travel the way of speaking in tongues. We must take the way of life. It does not depend on what we say; it depends on what we are. For the sake of the Lord's recovery we must see the importance of life. We are not against any positive item in the Bible, but we desire that all the Lord's dear ones will go further and pursue the growth in life. We need to advance in growth and transformation. Let us go on to be a stone—precious, transparent, and built with others. By this, God will have His kingdom. The kingdom is the building up of the transformed saints. The more we grow, the more we will be transformed, be built up, and have the reality of the kingdom.

THE CORNERSTONE

In Matthew 21 the Jewish people were trying their best to find fault with the Lord Jesus, to condemn Him, and to cause Him to make a mistake. These religious people were apparently so scriptural, trying to do everything according to the Bible, but the Lord Jesus asked them, "Have you never read in the Scriptures, 'The stone which the builders rejected, this has become the

head of the corner...'?" (v. 42). Within the Lord's heart was the thought that both He and His disciples were pieces of stone for the building. The disciples were stones, and the Lord Jesus Himself was the cornerstone. Although the Lord Jesus is the Savior and the Redeemer, when He faced those religious ones who were arguing with Him, He told them that He was the cornerstone for God's building. He was telling them that the person whom they had rejected is the cornerstone for God's building. Peter remembered this, and when the religious leaders were persecuting him, he quoted the same verse from the Psalms (Acts 4:11; Psa. 118:22). Acts 4:12 is frequently quoted by Christians, but few of them also quote verse 11 concerning the building. Today most Christians care only for their salvation; they do not care for God's building. In the Lord's recovery we must pay our full attention to God's building. As long as we are in this building, we are saved. Some Christians like to talk about eternal security. The real security, however, is to be built into God's building. If we are built into this building, we will be secure. Others are concerned with holiness. If we are truly built into God's building, we will be separated and sanctified. Other people are troubled about their lack of patience and their temper. If we would be built into the local churches, our temper will be terminated, and we will have the patience we need. First is Acts 4:11 concerning the building, followed by Acts 4:12 concerning salvation. If we are built into God's building, we are surely saved. The Lord Jesus is not only the Redeemer; He is also the cornerstone for God's building. This is the Lord's building in Matthew. Christ is the cornerstone, and His disciples are the living stones for the building of God.

CHAPTER FIFTEEN

THE DEVELOPMENT OF GROWTH, TRANSFORMATION, AND BUILDING

Scripture Reading: Matt. 16:28; Mark 9:1; Matt. 16:18-19; Rom. 14:17-18; 1 Cor. 4:17, 20; 3:2, 6, 9-12, 16

The revelation of God in the Bible follows a very important principle: what is mentioned in the beginning has as its consummation at the end. From the beginning of the Bible to the end, one line and one flow are revealed. Genesis 2 mentions the tree of life, and Revelation 22 likewise mentions the tree of life. Throughout the whole Bible, the main item that is revealed is life. Because the Bible begins with life, it also ends with life.

The New Testament is written in the same manner. In Matthew there is the beginning, and in Revelation there is the completion. The seed is sown in Matthew, the sprout appears in Acts, the growth and blossoming of the fruit is seen in the Epistles, and the harvest takes place in Revelation.

We may apply this principle to the matters of growth, transformation, and building. The Lord Jesus as the seed has been sown into us so that He may grow in us, transform us, and build us up, all of which are aspects of the kingdom. The growth of Christ within us is the aspect of the kingdom. Transformation by life is also an aspect of the kingdom. According to our natural understanding and concept, the kingdom is merely an age, a period of time, or a realm. Although the New Testament meaning of the kingdom does include the concept of time and sphere, it means much more than this. Both time and sphere are included in the New Testament concept of the kingdom, but they are not the kingdom itself. They are not the reality of the kingdom. The reality of the kingdom is Christ working Himself into us and spreading Himself through our being until maturity. The kingdom began to come at the time of the Lord's sowing, and it continues to come gradually as He grows within us. When Christ within us reaches maturity, that will be the full coming, the full manifestation of the kingdom.

When John the Baptist proclaimed that the kingdom of the heavens had drawn near, the Lord Jesus Himself came. John did not say, "Behold, the Messiah has drawn near" or "Behold, the Savior has drawn near" or "The Redeemer has drawn near." Rather, he said, "Repent, for the kingdom of the heavens has drawn near" (Matt. 3:2). He proclaimed a kingdom, yet a person came. The Lord Jesus also charged His disciples, first the twelve and later the seventy, to preach the kingdom. The disciples preached the living person of Christ. This is strong proof that the kingdom revealed in Matthew is the living person of Christ.

Do not forget what the Lord Jesus is. He is the wonderful One revealed in the first chapter of Matthew—Jehovah-plus and God-plus, Jehovah the Savior and God with us. He is the issue of many human generations mingled with the Triune God. This wonderful person is the seed of the kingdom, who is sown into us, grows in us continually, and finally reaches maturity. The seed is sown in Matthew, sprouts in Acts, grows and blossoms in the Epistles, and is harvested in Revelation. We need to pray much over these points, considering the verses in the presence of the Lord in order to see the revelation and the reality. We must live under a controlling vision of the kingdom.

A REVELATION OF THE KINGDOM

Matthew is not a book of mere stories or doctrines; it is a book giving us a revelation of the kingdom. The kingdom is the wonderful Christ who has been sown into us and who grows in us, transforming us until we reach maturity. Eventually, the time of harvest will come, and that will be the full manifestation of the kingdom. We must see this. We need to look at the book of Matthew from a heavenly angle, not from the angle of stories, doctrines, and teachings. If we look at Matthew from a heavenly angle, we will see that it reveals the Lord Jesus as the seed of the kingdom, as the gradual growth of the kingdom, and as the full maturity of the kingdom. We must see Matthew from such a viewpoint.

The New Testament reveals the Lord Jesus as the seed of the kingdom sown into people. When the seed grows within them, that is simply the growth of the kingdom. As He spreads within people, that is the spreading of the kingdom. One day He will be matured in so many who love Him. When the time of ripeness comes, that will be the time of harvest, the full manifestation of the kingdom.

THE SPREADING OF THE LORD JESUS

How can we prove that the kingdom is the spreading of the Lord Jesus? The strongest proof is found in Matthew 16:28, where He told His disciples that some of them would not die before they saw the Son of Man coming in His kingdom. The parallel verse in Mark 9:1 says, "...until they see the kingdom of God having come in power." Six days later He went up to the mountaintop with three of His disciples and was transfigured before them. The transfiguration of the Lord Jesus was His spreading. Jehovah-plus and God-Jehovah-plus indwelt the little Nazarene, Jesus. On the mountaintop, Jehovah-plus and God-plus shined out of the Nazarene. Peter was surprised and said, "Lord, it is good for us to be here" (Matt. 17:4). In a sense, Peter did not know how to respond. What we call the transfiguration was, in the Lord's words, the coming of the kingdom of God. The coming of the kingdom was the shining, the spreading, the release, and the overshadowing of the Lord Jesus. One day, when we experience the full coming of the kingdom, we will be surprised just as Peter was. We will not know what to say.

THE KINGDOM IN ROMANS

Now we need to consider some passages in the Epistles. Romans 14:17-18 shows us that the kingdom is present today and that the kingdom is simply the proper church life. According to some teachers, the kingdom has not yet come. They say that today is the dispensation of the church, and the next dispensation will be that of the kingdom. But Paul says that the "kingdom of God *is*..." (v. 17). He does not say that the kingdom of God *shall be;* he uses the present tense and says that the kingdom of God *is.* "The kingdom of God is not eating and drinking, but righteousness and peace and joy in the Holy Spirit."

He goes on in verse 18 to say, "He who serves Christ in this is well pleasing to God and approved by men." These verses reveal that the kingdom is the serving of Christ. To serve Christ is not mainly to do things for Christ; it is primarily to minister Christ to others. First, we experience Christ, and Christ becomes ours. Then we minister the Christ we have gained to others. This is what it means to serve Christ, and this serving of Christ is the kingdom.

Some of you have been reading the book of Romans for years and may think that Romans is only about salvation and justification by faith. Have you

ever noticed that in Romans there is the kingdom as the serving of Christ? Romans 14 presents a strategic point: the kingdom of God is the serving of Christ, the ministering of Christ, to others. Therefore, Romans also is a book on the kingdom.

FIRST CORINTHIANS

Many of those who have been involved in the Pentecostal or charismatic things say that 1 Corinthians is a book concerning speaking in tongues. They quote 1 Corinthians 14:18 where Paul says that he spoke with tongues more than all of them. From this they infer that we should all speak in tongues. No doubt there is such a verse in 1 Corinthians. But let us consider 1 Corinthians 4:17 and 20. Verse 17 says, "As I teach everywhere in every church." If you read the context, you will see that this verse has nothing to do with speaking in tongues. Verse 20 says, "The kingdom of God is not in speech but in power." If we put these two verses together and consider the context, we will realize that the church is the kingdom of God. In verse 17 Paul says, "Everywhere in every church"; in verse 20 he says, "The kingdom of God." After referring to his teaching in every church, Paul says that the kingdom is not in speech but in power. *Church* and *kingdom* are used interchangeably, proving that the proper church life is the kingdom.

The situation of Christianity today is abnormal, making it difficult for us to see the real thing. Many have held the concept that today is the age of the church and that some time in the future will be the age of the kingdom. Some teach that it is not necessary or possible to have the proper church today. Few know what the church is, and still fewer know that the church is the kingdom.

THE CHURCH LIFE BEING THE KINGDOM

In both Romans and 1 Corinthians Paul indicates clearly that the church life is the kingdom. Matthew shows the same thing: "I will build My church, and...I will give to you the keys of the kingdom" (16:18-19). The church built by the Lord Jesus is the kingdom. The seed that is sown in Matthew grows in the Epistles. Thus, Paul also tells us that the church is the kingdom. The Lord Jesus spoke about the church as the kingdom in a simple way because Matthew contains the seeds. In the Epistles Paul expounds upon the church as the kingdom in a fuller way. We need the whole book of Romans and the whole book of 1 Corinthians in order to know the church as the kingdom.

FEEDING FOR THE KINGDOM

Based upon this we come to 1 Corinthians 3. Of course, the word *kingdom* is not found in this chapter, but other verses in this book indicate that the church life is the kingdom (4:17, 20). First of all, Paul says, "I fed you" (KJV). In order to have the church as the kingdom, we need the feeding. Paul does not say, "I taught you"; he says, "I fed you." We do not need the teaching; we need the feeding. We need to eat and drink. Both the milk and the solid food mentioned in 3:2 are Christ. He is our food. When Paul said, "I fed you with milk," it means that he fed them with Christ. How we long to see the leading ones in all the local churches constantly feeding the younger ones with Christ.

Although Paul was a great teacher, he was also a wonderful feeder. He fed people with Christ. Paul goes on to say that he planted, Apollos watered, and God caused the growth (v. 6). Eventually, Paul said that by the grace given to him, he was a wise master builder (v. 10). Paul was a marvelous person: he was a feeder, a planter, and a builder. For God's kingdom in the local churches today, we also need to feed, to plant, and to build. We need to feed people, and we need to sow the seed. We need to plant vegetables that by growth and transformation will become minerals—gold, silver, and precious stones. How could the plantation become minerals? What kind of tree did Paul plant that, as it grew, became gold, silver, and precious stones? Paul says, "You are God's cultivated land, God's building" (v. 9). How can we reconcile these two things? The cultivated land is something of vegetables; the building is primarily of stones and minerals. How can we be both vegetables and minerals? The answer is that the life which grows within us is a transforming life. It not only grows, but it also transforms. While it grows, it transforms, and the more it grows, the more it transforms. This life transforms us from vegetables to minerals.

Now we can see that Paul's concept in 1 Corinthians 3 is exactly the same as the Lord's concept in Matthew 13. As we have seen already, the first four parables in Matthew 13 concern the vegetable life. The seed grows, matures, and produces fine flour. The next two parables concern the treasure and the pearl, representing transformed items. Therefore, in Matthew 13 there are both growth and transformation. In 1 Corinthians 3 there is also growth and transformation. The concept is exactly the same. Following Matthew 13, the Lord told us that the stones are for the building. "You are a stone, and...I will

build My church" (16:18, Gk.). In Matthew we see the growth with transformation to produce stones for the building. In Matthew all of this was in seed form and was somewhat undeveloped, but the growth and the blossoming of this seed in 1 Corinthians 3 is very clear. Paul planted, Apollos watered, and God caused the growth. Following the growth, there is transformation. While the plant grows, it is transformed into gold, silver, and precious stones to be the materials for God's building. Eventually, the planter becomes the feeder, and the feeder becomes the builder. The kingdom is a matter of planting, feeding, watering, growing, transforming, and building. Finally, Paul says, "You are the temple of God" (v. 16). This is not a Christian organization or religious society; this is the church, the kingdom. The kingdom is something that is planted, that grows, that is transformed, and that is built up into the very temple of God.

CHAPTER SIXTEEN

THE HARVEST OF GROWTH, TRANSFORMATION, AND BUILDING

Scripture Reading: 2 Cor. 3:6b, 17-18; Rom. 12:2, 5; Eph. 4:22-24; Rev. 4:2-3; 21:10-11, 18a, 19a

As we have seen in the last chapter, 1 Corinthians 3 covers the matters of growth, transformation, and building. The same items can be seen in the book of Ephesians. Ephesians 2:20-22 and 4:12-16 are related to growth, transformation, and building.

THE GIFTED ONES PERFECTING THE SAINTS

The gifted persons mentioned in Ephesians 4:11, the apostles, prophets, evangelists, and shepherds and teachers, are for the perfecting of the saints (v. 12). The gifted persons themselves are not the direct builders of the churches. They are the perfecters, perfecting the saints. As the result of their perfecting work, the saints will be qualified and equipped to function as members of the Body to build the churches directly. Neither the Lord Jesus nor the gifted persons such as the apostles and evangelists build up the churches directly. Rather, the members who have been perfected, that is, equipped and qualified to function, build up the churches directly.

PERFECTED BY GROWING IN LIFE

What does it mean to perfect the saints? In my early ministry I thought that perfecting the saints meant to give them some ability or spiritual art, so I trained people in this way. Eventually, I learned that this was not the proper training. Ephesians 4:12 speaks of the perfecting of the saints. Verse 13 mentions a full-grown man. Verse 14 speaks of being no longer little children. Verse 15 tells us to grow up into Christ in all things. All these verses are related to the matter of growth. To perfect the saints means to help them grow into a full-grown man, to be no more little children, and to grow up in all things into Christ. According to the context in Ephesians 4, to perfect the saints is simply to help them to grow. As living members of the Body of Christ, the saints need to grow.

The same is true concerning the human body. When a child is born, he is complete with all his organs. He has ears, eyes, a tongue, lips, and all the other members. It is unnecessary and even impossible to add more organs to a baby; organically speaking, he is complete. Whatever organs the parents have, the baby also has. Still, although he is complete organically, he is not complete in his function and ability. Thus, the baby needs perfecting. To perfect him means to cause him to grow. After growing for a year, he will be able to walk. After another period of time, he will begin to speak. He was born with two feet and a mouth, but he lacked the ability to walk and speak. The more he grows, the more he is perfected. In other words, he becomes equipped and qualified. Although the baby has all the necessary organs at birth, he needs the proper amount of growth before the ability of these organs can be manifested. For example, a baby's eyes are not very useful immediately after birth. Although the baby has eyes, their ability to function is limited because of the lack of growth. With the proper growth, the eyes begin to function after a short time. The seeing organ is present at birth, but the seeing ability develops with the growth.

What then does it mean to perfect the saints in the church? It does not mean to add something to them. We should not and in fact cannot do this. Rather, we should help them grow. All the saints must grow into a full-grown man and no longer be little children. They must grow up into Christ, the Head, in all things.

THE WAY TO GROW

What is the best way, actually the only way, to help children grow? All the mothers know the best way is not to teach them but to feed them. Feeding, not teaching, causes children to grow. This is why Paul said, "I fed you" (1 Cor. 3:2, KJV). How can we likewise perfect the saints? We should not merely teach them; we should feed them. Paul planted and Apollos watered (v. 6). To water the plant is simply to feed it. What the churches as the kingdom need for the perfecting of the saints is not teaching but feeding. As mothers know, little ones are perfected year after year by growth. Because of this growth they are able to do many things. But this does not mean that the children lacked the organs before the perfecting work began. It simply means they lacked the ability. This ability comes only by perfecting, and perfecting comes from the feeding which helps them grow. Such feeding is what all the churches as the kingdom need today.

TEACHINGS AND GIFTS

After hearing some of my messages, a few people were offended and argued, saying, “You say that we don’t need teachings, gifts, or regulations. Don’t you think that the teachings are helpful? Are the gifts not needed? Don’t you think that some of the regulations are good?” My response is that it all depends on how you use them. These things are all right if they help people to grow, but the tragedy is that many Bible teachers help people only to know the Bible, not to grow. I know this from experience, because I was under the best Bible teaching for seven and a half years. During that period I did not have the slightest amount of growth in life as a result of that teaching. Many others have had the same experience. Perhaps, in some exceptional cases, Bible teachings helped people grow a little. However, they did not help very much. Everything depends on whether the teaching affords people the growth in life.

The same is true with the gifts. I was personally involved with them, especially with tongues. I am sorry to say that I did not witness the genuine growth in life among the people who spoke in tongues. I am not criticizing or despising, but I must be faithful and honest to speak the truth. Check with so many of the people who speak in tongues. Where is the growth? Today the churches as the kingdom of God need something to help them grow in life. If speaking in tongues can help the saints grow in life, I am for it. I myself dropped it because I found that it produced no growth. Speaking in tongues may stir up your heart and your spirit, but once you have been stirred up, you must immediately turn to life. Otherwise, you will be hungry. Regardless of how much you exercise your gifts, you will remain hungry. Speaking in tongues will never feed you. You may say that it gives some satisfaction, but do you have the growth?

Even growth by itself is not adequate. The proper growth produces transformation, a genuine change in life, a metabolic change in your being. Transformation is the true proof of your growth. Following transformation comes the building. The real growth produces transformation, and transformation issues in the building. On the contrary, most people who speak in tongues are very independent. Thank the Lord if you have received help from speaking in tongues, but if you remain there, you may become independent and individualistic.

I know these things from my experience. I was involved with them and saw them for myself. In the meetings held for the exercise of spiritual gifts, most people do not care for others; everyone cares for his own practice of the gifts. In their daily living as well, it is very difficult for tongue-speaking people to be one with others. Throughout the history of the church, no one has been more divisive than tongue-speaking people. Nearly every tongue-speaker is a division in himself. In spite of this, there is a kind of assurance among tongue-speaking people that if all the believers will speak in tongues, all will be one. This is superstition. History proves the opposite. There is not the proper oneness among tongue-speaking people. What we need today is the proper growth that results in transformation and building. This will produce the real oneness.

GROWTH IN LIFE

Why did the apostle Paul write 1 Corinthians 3 as he did? Why did he say that he planted, Apollos watered, and God caused the growth? Why did he say that, as a wise master builder, the grace of God was given to him, that he laid a foundation, and that another builds upon it with either gold, silver, and precious stones, or wood, grass and stubble? We need to consider the entire book to understand why he wrote in this way. In 1 Corinthians 1:5 and 7 Paul told the Corinthians that they had all knowledge and lacked no gifts. But then he said in 3:1 that he could not speak to them as to spiritual men. He told them that they were still fleshy, infants in Christ. This is why we say that Bible knowledge and gifts in themselves do not help. The Corinthians had both but were very short in growth. In the local churches we are not sectarian or exclusive; we receive every proper thing that is of the Lord. We are not opposed to Bible knowledge; neither are we opposed to the gifts. But the Lord's recovery today is not a matter of knowledge or gifts—it is a matter of growth in life. During the past one hundred fifty years, the doctrines and gifts have been recovered, but the growth in life has not been recovered adequately. Our burden today is for the recovery of the growth in life. It is good that you have Bible knowledge and that you have spoken in tongues, but do not stop with these things. Go on to the growth in life. There is such a danger that those who have Bible knowledge will stop there, and that those who have experienced gifts will stop there. You must go on. Knowledge may be a bridge to bring you from one side to the other, but do not stay on that bridge. You need to go on to life.

THE BASIC STRUCTURES

The book of Matthew does not emphasize Bible knowledge or gifts. Rather, it stresses the seed of life and the growth of that seed with transformation to produce minerals for the building up of the church (ch. 13). The Lord told Peter that he was a stone and that He would build His church and give to Peter the keys of the kingdom (ch. 16). These are some of the basic items found in the book of Matthew. The seven parables in Matthew, the mysteries of the kingdom, are also basic items. On the contrary, healing and tongues are not basic structures. The basic structures are the seed, growth, transformation, and building. I am not against Bible knowledge or gifts, but I am against overemphasizing them. Some who speak in tongues care for nothing but tongue-speaking. The church is not a tongue-speaking church, and the Lord's recovery is not the recovery of tongue-speaking. Although tongue-speaking may have helped people, it is not basic. The basic items are the seed, the growth, the transformation, and the building.

IN THE EPISTLES

What is sown as a seed in Matthew 13 is developed in 1 Corinthians 3. There we see the growth, the transformation, and the building with precious materials. Bible knowledge is good, but do not remain there. We all must grow. The Lord is looking for the building that comes out of the growth in life and the transformation by life. Nothing else can satisfy Him.

The ultimate consummation of the Bible is the New Jerusalem. In the New Jerusalem gifts, knowledge, and regulations cannot be found. There is simply the flow of life, the tree of life, gold, pearls, and precious stones.

To perfect the saints is not simply to teach them the Bible or to train them to exercise gifts. To perfect the saints is a matter of feeding them and of helping them to grow. If speaking in tongues and Bible knowledge have helped people in some way, we thank God. However, they must go on positively to have the growth in life. To perfect the saints is to cause them to grow into a full-grown man. Has tongue-speaking produced this kind of growth? Has it produced a full-grown man? People who stress gifts are "children...carried about by every wind of teaching" (Eph. 4:14). Among them there is no full-grown man. They do not know how to grow into Christ in all things for the direct building up of the Body. Ephesians 4:15 says that we need

to grow up into the Head in all things. Then verse 16 says that after growing up into the Head, we must all be joined together and knit together through every joint of the rich supply and through the operation in the measure of each one part. This is the way that the Body, the church, is built up directly.

Do not be distracted by anything. Bible knowledge may help, but do not be distracted by it. Gifts may help, but do not be frustrated by them. After using these bridges to get from one side to another, leave them and go on to the growth in life that will produce adequate and proper transformation. Then we will have gold, pearls, and precious stones for God's building. God's intention is to have a building.

In Matthew we do not find gifts or Bible knowledge, and in 1 Corinthians Paul belittled both gifts and Bible knowledge. Neither Ephesians nor Romans says much about gifts, although in Romans the gift of hospitality and other such gifts are mentioned. We need the gift of hospitality. Although you may speak in tongues a great deal, if you keep three guests in your home for a period of time, you will be exposed as to how little growth you really have. We need the growth in life. For the building of the local churches we do not need the so-called gifts; we need growth.

THE BOOK OF REVELATION

Now we come to the harvest in Revelation. The seed is in Matthew, its growth is in the Epistles, and the harvest is in Revelation. The picture of the city presented in Revelation 21 and 22 is very clear. That city is not built of clay or bricks. All the cities constructed by the enemy as counterfeit buildings were made of bricks. The tower of Babel was built with bricks (Gen. 11:3), as were the two cities of Pharaoh built by the enslaved Israelites (Exo. 1:11, 14). Bricks are composed of mud plus human work. God never builds this way. His building is composed of gold, pearls, and precious stones. It has nothing of mud and the work of human hands. God's building is marvelous in our eyes because it is altogether His doing. No man can manufacture the materials for God's building. Gold, pearls, and precious stones are produced by God Himself. Every part of the New Jerusalem has been transformed. At the center of this city is the throne of God (Rev. 22:1, 3), indicating the kingdom. The throne signifies the ruling authority. The ruling and reigning of God are there. Out of the throne proceeds a river of life that waters the entire city, and within the river of life grows the tree of life that feeds the city (vv. 1-2). This is

a picture signifying that watering and feeding produce growth, transformation, and building. This is the harvest of the seed sown in Matthew.

A FORETASTE

We do not have to wait until the future to enjoy feeding, watering, growing, transformation, and building. We in the Lord's recovery of the churches are qualified and privileged to have a foretaste now. Of course, we do not yet have the full taste, but the foretaste indicates that the full taste is coming. The sisters have a foretaste of a meal in the kitchen before putting it on the table. The foretaste is indicative of the full taste. Actually, the foretaste of a meal is exactly the same as the full taste, but on a smaller scale. The foretaste cannot be salty and the full taste sweet. The full taste that will be in the New Jerusalem is what we enjoy in the local churches today as the foretaste.

The full taste includes the river of life, the tree of life, growth, transformation, and building. What about Bible knowledge and gifts? They are not to be found in the New Jerusalem. In the New Jerusalem we can see the river of life and the tree of life. We see growth, transformation, and building. We see a city constructed with gold, pearls, and precious stones. This is all we can see. Since these are the items of the full taste, we should not add other things to the foretaste. Rather, we should enjoy these items of the foretaste. Revelation 21 and 22 show us a complete picture of the kingdom as our full taste.

TRANSFORMATION

The crucial point in God's building is transformation. In Christianity very little is known about transformation. Even if you listen to the outstanding preachers and consult the libraries and bookstores, you will find very little being said about transformation. What is transformation? Transformation means that the Lord Jesus, the seed of life, with all His rich element, is being added into you. His essence is the all-inclusive Spirit. This Spirit is the very essence and element of the Lord Jesus. After you were saved, He began to impart His element into you. Day by day, as you open yourself and give Him opportunity, He will impart His element into you. Doctrines are not the element. Only Christ Himself, the all-inclusive life-giving Spirit, is the element. Such a Christ as the all-inclusive Spirit is imparting Himself into your spirit, and from your spirit into your whole being. He will spread into

your heart, mind, emotion, and will. This element of Christ is truly a transforming element. Once this element comes into you, something happens. For example, after mothers feed their children, the food is digested and assimilated by the children. The element of the food enters the children's blood, and then it penetrates their cells and organic tissues, causing them to grow.

Growth is always accompanied by metabolism. Metabolism does not mean an outward change but an inward change that results from a new element being added into your being. This new element discharges the old things and produces something new. Suppose a young man has a very pale face. If I wish to change him outwardly, I can apply pink powder to change his color. This is the way morticians change people. They make cosmetic alterations in an attempt to beautify a dead body. However, regardless of how beautiful it may be, it is still dead. Such outward beautification and alteration is not transformation. Do not try to alter a person's countenance by coloring his face with powder. Rather, feed him with milk, steak, apples, and other good food. After a few weeks you will see some genuine transformation. In Ephesians 3:8 Paul says that he preached the unsearchable riches of Christ. This means that he fed people with the riches of Christ. In 1 Corinthians Paul says, "I have fed you" (3:2). He goes on further to say that Christ is our spiritual food and spiritual drink (10:3-4).

In 2 Corinthians 3:6 Paul says that the letter kills. The letter refers to the black and white letters of the Bible. The letter kills, but the Spirit gives life. We must have the Spirit. Who is the Spirit? "The last Adam became a life-giving Spirit" (1 Cor. 15:45b). "The Lord is the Spirit" (2 Cor. 3:17). The pure Word says that the letter kills, but the Spirit gives life. "The Lord is the Spirit." What shall we do? We simply need to open ourselves continually and say to the Lord, "O Lord Jesus! Come in, Lord Jesus! Fill me up, Lord Jesus!" Open yourself and let Christ fill you. If you are faithful to receive Him in a constant and thorough way, He will spread into your inner being. By the proper digestion and assimilation, you will be saturated by all the nourishing elements of Christ.

These elements not only nourish but also kill. Just as in good food there is the killing power to kill germs, likewise, in the element of Christ there is the killing power. The killing power of the cross is in the all-inclusive Spirit of Jesus Christ. The more you take Him into you and allow Him to penetrate you,

the more all the negative, corrupting things—the flesh, the leaven, and the worldly things—will be killed. In addition, you will receive nourishment, and you will grow and be transformed. By this transformation you will be built together. Knowledge and gifts cannot transform you and build you together. Only the Spirit of life can perform this work.

THE SHAPING OF LIFE

Within the process of transformation is the shaping of life. In every form of life there is the life essence, life power, life law, and life shape. The element of Christ has the divine element within it. The more you enjoy Christ by eating Him and taking Him into you, the more the divine element will saturate you. This element, the life of God, has an essence, a power, a law, and a shape. As it grows within you, it will regulate and shape you, conforming you to the image and form of Christ. The more you are transformed, the more you will be conformed to the image of Christ. Ephesians 4:22 says, "Put off...the old man." How can we put off the old man? The more we try to put him off, the more he comes back. Only the element of Christ can discharge the old man. The more the element of Christ discharges the old man, the more we put off the old man. The best way to rid yourself of the old man is to eat something new of Christ. This will discharge all the oldness. This is what it means to put off the old man. The practical way to put off the old man is to take Christ in. The more He comes in, the more He will discharge the elements of the old man.

The result of this process will be something new—the corporate Christ, Christ as the corporate new man. The new man is the church and is the reality of the kingdom. The putting on of the new man is the putting on of the kingdom; the putting on of the church life is the putting on of the kingdom. The kingdom is the spreading of the Lord Jesus. After He comes into us, He spreads Himself within us and discharges all our oldness. Then we are in the kingdom. Ephesians 4:24 says that the new man is created according to God. Not only is the old man discharged, but a new man comes to replace him. This new man is a corporate man created according to the image of God.

Genesis 1:26 says that man was created in the image of God, but it is only through the spreading of Christ within us that we will have the real image of God and exercise God's dominion. If we do not express the image of God, it will be difficult for us to exercise God's dominion. The image of God is for the

kingdom of God. If we have His image, we can represent Him. We can become the representative of God. That is the kingdom. Therefore, the image is for the kingdom.

When we come to the book of Revelation, we see that there is a throne in the universe, and God is sitting upon it. His appearance upon the throne is like a jasper and a sardius stone (4:2-3). Jasper is a shining, transparent, light-green stone, signifying God Himself, and sardius is a red stone, signifying Christ as the redeeming Lamb. In Revelation 22:1 we see God on the throne and the Lamb.

Eventually, the wall of New Jerusalem is built with jasper, and the city has the appearance of jasper (21:11, 18). This means that the city has the appearance of God, because the glory of the city and the shining of the city are the glory and shining of jasper. Also, of the twelve layers of foundation stones, the first layer is jasper (v. 19). Thus, the whole city has the appearance of jasper, that is, the appearance of God. This is not only transformation but also conformation. God's building, New Jerusalem, will be conformed to God and bear His image.

Today some teach that each local church should have its own distinctiveness and appearance. If they would read the last two chapters of Revelation, they would see that the whole city, from every direction, has the same appearance. The city has one expression and bears one image—the image and expression of God. The city faces four directions, yet it has only one appearance.

In the same principle, there are many local churches, yet all of them are golden lampstands. None bears its own expression, such as silver or copper or bamboo or mud. However, some say that each local church should be distinctive. If one expresses gold, the other should express bamboo. If one is golden, the other should be copper. According to Revelation 1:12 and 2:1, each lampstand is a golden lampstand. If you were to change the position of the lampstands, it would be difficult to identify them. Because of pride, people love to be independent, different from others, and individualistic.

John the Baptist proclaimed, "The kingdom of the heavens has drawn near," and the Lord Jesus repeated the same words (Matt. 3:2; 4:17). The situation is quite different today. If one should preach that the kingdom of the heavens

has drawn near, another, refusing to use the same term, might preach that the church has drawn near. People like to speak something new to display how smart they are. This is not the way of God's kingdom. In God's kingdom all the lampstands are golden. Eventually, all the lampstands will lose their identity. When the seven lampstands are placed together, we should not be able to see a difference between them. Eventually, the whole city of New Jerusalem will express the one image and appearance of God.

CHAPTER SEVENTEEN

TRANSFORMATION—
A SEED IN THE PARABLE OF THE TEN VIRGINS

Scripture Reading: Matt. 25:1-13; 24:40-42; Prov. 20:27; Rom. 9:21, 23-24

In this chapter we come to the parable of the ten virgins found in Matthew 25:1-13. Something very basic is found in this parable, but for centuries Christians have not fully apprehended it. Of all the parables in the book of Matthew, the parable of the ten virgins is the most mysterious. If it were standing alone apart from the rest of the Bible, it would be impossible for us to understand this parable.

As we have seen in a previous chapter, from the time of Matthew 13, the Lord no longer spoke about the kingdom in an open way. He began to speak in parables, in a mysterious way. In Matthew 13:10-17 He gave the reason for speaking in parables: the religious people assumed that they were for God and that they knew the Scriptures, but actually they were not for God and did not understand the Scriptures. Thus, the Lord began to hide the kingdom from them, making it a mystery, and to reveal it to those who meant business with Him, to those who were poor in spirit and pure in heart. Only those who are poor in spirit and pure in heart can apprehend the mysteries of the kingdom. Whenever the Lord spoke about the kingdom from Matthew 13 to the end of the book, He spoke in the way of a mystery.

We praise the Lord that today, by the revelation of the entire Scriptures, it is not difficult for us to understand this parable of the ten virgins. We can have a proper, exact, and accurate interpretation of each point of this parable. The parable of the ten virgins is actually like a jigsaw puzzle. This jigsaw puzzle has been cut into many mysterious pieces, and we must find a way to collect all the pieces and put them together. All the pieces to this puzzle are hidden in the Scriptures. If we know the way to find them and how to put them together, they will show us a clear picture of the economy of God. No other picture in the entire Bible shows us the economy of God as clearly as the parable of the ten virgins.

TEN IN NUMBER

First, we must discover why the Lord Jesus used the number ten. Why did He say ten virgins and not fifteen or twelve or eight or two? Perhaps you may be thinking that the number ten signifies completion, such as ten fingers and ten toes. We should recall that this parable concerns the kingdom of the heavens, whose number should be twelve and not ten. The number of the kingdom must be twelve because in the Old Testament the number of the tribes of the people who were representatives of God's kingdom was twelve. Also, the number of the apostles in the New Testament representing all the people of God is twelve. The representative number of the people of the kingdom is twelve. In the book of Revelation we see the ultimate consummation of God's economy, the New Jerusalem. In the New Jerusalem the number twelve is used almost exclusively: there are twelve foundations, twelve gates, twelve pearls, twelve apostles, twelve tribes, and twelve varieties of fruit from the tree of life. There is also the number one hundred forty-four, which is composed of twelve times twelve (21:12, 14, 17, 19-21; 22:2). Therefore, twelve is the proper number to represent God's kingdom.

According to the Bible, this number twelve is composed in a unique way. It is not composed of six plus six, seven plus five, or four plus eight. It is composed of four multiplied by three. Revelation 21 verifies this. In this chapter we see that the city is square, meaning that it has four equal sides (v. 16). On each side there are three gates, making a total of twelve (vv. 12-13). The number four in the Bible signifies the creatures. Man is the leading creature in God's creation, and the number four represents man, including all of us. The number three has two meanings: it signifies both the Triune God and resurrection. Therefore, the number three denotes the Triune God in resurrection.

The number twelve is not the result of addition but of multiplication. If it were the result of addition, the number would be seven and not twelve. In the early chapters of the book of Revelation, we see the addition of three plus four, giving us seven churches, seven lampstands, seven seals, and seven trumpets (1:4, 12; 6:1; 8:2). At the beginning of Revelation, three and four are added to make seven; at the end of Revelation, four and three are multiplied to make twelve. This is quite meaningful. As the church today we are the number seven because we are the creatures plus the Triune God in resurrection. The Triune God in His resurrection life has been added to us, making us the

number seven. The church is the addition of God to man. However, this is only the beginning, for the addition must be changed into multiplication. Multiplication means mingling, the mingling of three with four, which signifies the mingling of the Triune God in resurrection with man. At the time we were saved, God was added to us. Thereafter, addition will be changed into multiplication until we reach the full multiplication, which is the number twelve—man multiplied with God, man mingled with God. The New Jerusalem is the corporate and consummate mingling of God with man.

Why is there the number ten rather than twelve in the parable of the virgins? This means that two are lacking. Ten indicates the majority of twelve. Of the twelve tribes of Israel in the Old Testament, ten rebelled against the house of David. Only two tribes, Judah and Benjamin, were left. So ten out of twelve means the majority of twelve. We see the same thought in an instance in the Gospels: ten of the twelve apostles had one concept, and the other two apostles had a different concept (Matt. 20:20-24). Again, ten represents the majority of the twelve, with two as the remainder. Therefore, the number ten signifies the majority of the people of God.

To find the remaining two you must read the preceding chapter, Matthew 24:40-42. These verses mention two men working in the field or two women grinding at the mill. In Matthew 25 we have the number ten; in Matthew 24 we have the number two. The concluding word of these two portions is the same: "Watch therefore, for you do not know on what day your Lord comes" (24:42; 25:13). This word of warning was given both to the two and to the ten, indicating that they go together. The two plus the ten equal twelve, the complete number of God's people.

When the Lord Jesus returns, the believers will be of two classes. The primary division is ten and two. Because the two men or two women were working, they represent the believers who will be alive when the Lord returns. The ten, on the contrary, were all asleep indicating that the majority of the believers will have died by the time the Lord returns. Do not consider that only the five foolish virgins slept while the five wise virgins did not. The Bible says that all ten were asleep. What does it mean for the believers in Christ to sleep? First Thessalonians 4:14-16 tells us clearly that for the believers to sleep means they are dead. In the eyes of God, the dead believers are not actually dead; they are sleeping, resting, and waiting for the resurrection.

By this we can see that the ten virgins represent the dead saints; both the foolish and the prudent have died because of the delay in the Bridegroom's coming. The foolish ones died, and the prudent ones, including Peter, John, Martin Luther, and many other saints, also died. They were waiting and expecting the Lord's coming back, but He tarried, so they all became drowsy and slept. The ten virgins represent the dead saints, and the other two represent the living saints. When the Lord returns, the majority of the saints will be among the dead ones. The living saints will be the remainder, signified by the two.

Many Christians have the concept that death automatically solves all problems. According to this concept, if they believe in the Lord Jesus, everything is settled when they die, regardless of whether they have been prudent or foolish, good or bad. They think that once they die, they will go to heaven, and everything will be fine. To them death is a type of graduation. It does not matter whether or not they have finished the course; as long as they die, they graduate. This concept is in the minds of so many Christians, but I must tell you that death does not solve any problem. Death does not automatically make everything all right. If your problem with the Lord has been solved before death, it has been solved; if your problem with the Lord has not been solved before death, it remains to be solved. Whether you live or die, the unsolved problem is still there.

Some have considered that the five foolish virgins represent false believers. But this is not logical. How can we say that the foolish ones are false ones? Parents who have several children know that some children are wise and some are foolish. Can the parents say that the foolish children are false children? It simply is not logical to say that the virgins were false because they were foolish. They were all virgins in every respect: in nature, in essence, in title, and in position. All were virgins; the only difference was in their behavior. A couple may have several children. Some of the children are wise, conducting themselves in a proper way; some are foolish, behaving in a naughty way. Can we say that the naughty ones, the foolish ones, are false children? Can the parents refuse to recognize them as their children because they are foolish? Likewise, whether they are prudent or foolish, virgins are virgins.

Furthermore, all the virgins had lamps that were burning. Matthew does not say that the lamps of only the prudent were burning and that the lamps of

the foolish were not burning because they were false. All the lamps were burning. How could a false Christian have a burning lamp? This is impossible! Matthew also says that all the virgins went forth (25:1). This means that they all went out of the world to meet the Bridegroom. Not only the five prudent virgins went forth to meet the Bridegroom but also the five foolish ones. As a believer, you are expecting to meet the Lord. However, you must be alert. Are you prudent or foolish? Whether you are prudent or foolish does not depend upon your smart mind. It depends upon your having oil in your vessel. The five prudent virgins, besides having burning lamps, had prepared an extra portion of oil in their vessels. The foolish ones did not have an extra portion of oil in their vessels. This one point determines who is prudent and who is foolish.

OIL IN THE VESSELS

What does it mean to prepare oil in the vessels? We praise the Lord that He has shown us the meaning of the lamps and the vessels. In the Bible there are the lamps and the vessels. Proverbs 20:27 tells us that the spirit of man is the lamp of Jehovah. The lamp signifies the spirit of man. What then are the vessels? Romans 9:21, 23, and 24 say that we are God's vessels, made to contain God. As God's vessels, we are human beings with a soul. Our spirit is the lamp, and our soul is the vessel.

THE PARTS OF MAN

According to the Bible, we have three parts: the spirit, the soul, and the body (1 Thes. 5:23). At the time we were saved, the Lord came into our spirit, and we were regenerated (John 3:6), but God cannot be expressed from our spirit alone. Therefore, we have a soul as a vessel to contain and to express God. Genesis 1:26-27 says that we were made in God's image. This does not refer to our spirit but to our soul. Because God is a God of love, we have a loving organ in our soul. Because He is a God of thought, we have an organ of thought in our soul. Because He is a God of decision, we have a deciding organ in our soul. God's image is related to the different parts of our soul. We are beings, not because we have a body or a spirit, but because we have a soul. The soul is our being. Sometimes in the Bible a person is called a soul. Genesis 46:27 says that seventy persons of the house of Jacob went down into Egypt. A soul is a human being, a person. Strictly speaking, it is our soul that is God's vessel; our spirit by itself cannot express God. God must be expressed

through our soul—through our mind, emotion, and will. The way we think should express God. The way we love and hate, like and dislike, should express God. The decisions and choices we make should also express God. In our spirit we do not have the ability to express God. The faculties for expressing God are found in our soul. Therefore, our soul is the vessel. According to the revelation of the Bible, this is very clear. Our spirit is the lamp of God, and our soul is the vessel of God.

Many times we have used the diagram of three concentric circles denoting the spirit, the soul, and the body. The spirit at the center is surrounded by the soul, which is composed of the mind, emotion, and will. The Bible considers the soul with its three parts plus one part of the spirit, the conscience, as the heart. The heart is very similar to the soul but somewhat larger since it includes the conscience, which is a part of the spirit. When we were saved, the Lord came into our spirit. However, the Lord has not spread very much into our soul—into our mind, emotion, and will. With some of us the Lord Jesus has not even been able to come into our conscience. He is confined to a small part of our spirit. But at least He has come into our spirit, He has enlightened us, and our spirit is now burning as a lamp.

Before we were saved, our spirit was darkened and deadened (Eph. 2:1, 5). We had no sensation regarding our spirit, and it seemed that there was not such a thing within us. When we heard the gospel or when we read the word of the gospel, something shined within us, and we received the light. As this light entered deep within us, we repented and called on the name of the Lord. Immediately, something deep within us was made alive and started to burn and to shine. We did have the sensation that deep within us something was living, burning, and shining. This means that God's Spirit had come into our spirit to enlighten us and to make us alive (John 3:6).

Although your spirit has been made alive, I am concerned that your mind has not been saturated by the Lord and that He has not penetrated your emotions. I am afraid that in some matters you have rejected the Lord. Some of you have been unwilling to pray because you fear that you will be caught by the Lord Jesus in a particular matter in your mind or emotions. Perhaps during the last few days some sisters have even resisted the Lord Jesus when He tried to spread into their emotions concerning their love of certain things.

All Christians have their lamps burning, but many have no desire or intention to prepare oil in their vessels. They are saved and have the Lord within them. Although their lamp is burning, they should not be at peace. They still have a problem because they are short of oil. They have some oil burning in their lamp, but they do not have the extra portion of oil in all the inward parts of their being—in their mind, emotion, will, and conscience. How wonderful that they have the oil in their lamp, but they still have a big problem with their soul. They have the Lord in their spirit but not in their soul.

THE OIL

Most Christians realize that oil is a symbol of the Spirit of God. We need to see that the Spirit of God is simply God Himself. In his book *The Spirit of Christ,* Andrew Murray says, "In the Father we have the unseen God, the Author of all. In the Son God revealed, made manifest, and brought nigh; He is the Form of God. In the Spirit of God we have the indwelling God: the Power of God dwelling in human body and working in it what the Father and Son have for us...what the Father has purposed and the Son has procured, can be appropriated and take effect in the members of Christ who are still here in the flesh, only through the continual intervention and active operation of the Holy Spirit." This realization is correct. The Spirit of God is simply God applied to us. When God is applied to us, He is the Spirit. The Spirit of God is simply God reaching us, God applied to us. The oil signifies God Himself in an all-inclusive way applied to us. When we called on the name of the Lord Jesus, He came into our spirit as such an oil, the all-inclusive Spirit of God. At that time our spirit was enlightened, and now it is burning. However, the Lord is still waiting for an opportunity to spread into our vessel—our mind, emotion, and will.

BUYING THE OIL

For the Lord to get into our spirit is easy. It is a free gift. We simply repent, call on Him, and He comes in. But there is a price to pay for Him to enter our inward parts. We must buy the oil. To have the Triune God as the all-inclusive oil spreading into our inward parts requires that we pay a price. He spreads within us at a cost. We must pay the price. Without paying the cost, it is impossible for the indwelling Christ who is in our spirit to spread Himself into our mind, emotion, and will. Although we have the oil in our spirit, we must

pay the price to have the extra portion of oil in our soul. If we will buy the oil now, we will have oil in our vessels when the Lord returns. Then we will be those prudent virgins who are ready to go in to the marriage feast of the Lamb.

BEARING THE RESPONSIBILITY

Why are the ten virgins divided into two groups of five? The meaning of five is marvelous. Our ten fingers are divided into two groups of five, and five is composed of four plus one. The number four, as we have already seen, represents the creatures including man. The number one represents the unique God, the Creator. Therefore, four plus one signifies man, the creature, plus God. Four plus one also signifies responsibility. Four fingers plus one thumb means that we must bear responsibility. Although it is truly marvelous to have God added to us, we must realize that man plus God equals responsibility. This means that both the prudent virgins and the foolish virgins must bear responsibility. Whether you are prudent or foolish is your responsibility. You are responsible to be a prudent virgin and to prepare an extra portion of oil in your vessel.

Because the bridegroom tarried, all the virgins slept. Even Paul and John are included here. Because the Lord Jesus has delayed His return, most of the saints who were mature, saturated, and filled with the Triune God have died. The Lord has tarried because many are not yet ready. This means that the harvest still is not ripe. The Lord has been waiting for the ripening of the harvest.

At midnight there was a cry, “Behold, the bridegroom!” (Matt. 25:6). We may compare this to 1 Thessalonians 4:16, which says that there will be a shout when Christ comes. The trumpeting of the angel will be the midnight cry. All the virgins, both prudent and foolish, will rise up. This word *rise* is also used for “resurrection” (1 Cor. 15:52). Resurrection means to rise up. So all the dead saints will be resurrected. First Thessalonians tells us clearly that the living saints will not precede the dead ones. The dead ones will rise first to meet the Lord.

Generally speaking, Christianity teaches people that if they believe in the Lord Jesus, they will have no difficulties; once they die, they will go to heaven. However, if you know the mystery of the kingdom, you will realize that there

is a great problem here. For example, let us consider the apostle Paul and the sinful brother in 1 Corinthians 5 who was excommunicated. You may think that the sinful person will be lost, but the Bible does not say that. Paul says that he delivered him over to Satan for the destruction of the flesh that his spirit may be saved (v. 5). According to the Bible, he is still a saved person. Today both Paul and that sinful brother are dead. Tell me fairly and logically, at the midnight cry will the condition of both of them be the same? Before he was martyred, Paul was filled and saturated with the Lord. The Lord had come into every inward part of his being, and he was fully matured and ready. He was truly a prudent virgin. He had not only a burning lamp but also a vessel filled with an extra portion of the Triune God. To Paul the Lord Jesus will present a reward (2 Tim. 4:8); to the other brother the Lord will say, "I do not know you" (Matt. 25:12). This statement, "I do not know you," does not mean that the Lord actually does not know him. The Lord knows everyone. There is a special meaning to this word. If you compare other verses in which this word occurs, you will discover that in Romans 7:15 Paul says, "What I work out, I do not acknowledge." Other versions say, "That which I do I allow not." Thus, we may translate the phrase *I do not know you* into "I allow you not." This means that the Lord did not approve. It is not a question of being lost or saved but of missing the opportunity to go into the marriage feast. Read Matthew 25 carefully. This is the pure Word of God. There is the possibility that you may lose the opportunity of entering the marriage feast.

Paul certainly will enter the marriage feast, but the fallen brother of 1 Corinthians 5 will not. In 1 Corinthians 9 Paul said that he was running the race. In Philippians 3 also, Paul said that he was still running the race, that he had not attained, and that he was still pressing on toward the goal. However, in 2 Timothy 4:6-8, just before he was martyred, he said that he was already being poured out and that a crown of righteousness was laid up for him and for all those who love the appearing of the Lord.

How can you say that as long as you believe in the Lord Jesus you will have no problems when you die? You will have no problems concerning salvation because you are saved for eternity. But you may miss your share in the marriage feast. The marriage feast is waiting for you, and whether you gain it or not depends on whether you are prudent or foolish. In other words, it depends on whether you are willing to pay the price. If you do not pay the price now, you will pay the price in that day. If you pay the price today, you will receive a prize in that day, but if you pay the price in that day, you will

receive no prize. It is very similar to being a student in school. If you study well and complete your courses, you will receive a prize at graduation. If you do not study well, you will fail and not graduate. Then you will have to make up the courses you failed. Do not think that as long as you are saved, there are no problems. You may have regeneration, but you still need transformation.

It is better to be prudent and to be transformed before you die. Tell the Lord, "Lord, I am waiting for Your coming. If You tarry, Lord, help me to be transformed before I die. I don't want to die without being transformed." What does it mean to be transformed? To be transformed is to be filled with the Lord in all your inward parts, to be saturated with the extra portion of the Triune God.

Some of you may ask, "After we are resurrected and the Lord returns, will we still have to pay something? Where shall we pay?" Do not ask so many questions. The Lord knows. I do not know. However, I do know by the Lord's clear Word, that after the midnight cry and after He returns, He will deal with those foolish ones who are not ready. They will not be lost. They will be resurrected, but after being resurrected they will be told to go and buy the oil (Matt. 25:9). I do not know where and how because the Lord has not revealed it, but I do know that such a thing will happen. We praise the Lord that He has revealed this to us as a warning.

We all have been regenerated, and now we are in the process of transformation. How much we will be transformed depends on how great a price we will pay. If we are willing to pay the price, the Lord certainly will saturate us, fill us up, and we will have the extra portion of oil prepared in our vessel, making us ready for His coming back.

CHAPTER EIGHTEEN

TRANSFORMATION—
ITS DEVELOPMENT IN THE EPISTLES

Scripture Reading: Eph. 1:13-14; 2:1, 5; 3:16-17, 19; 5:5, 18

Most of the truths in the book of Matthew were sown there as seeds with their growth taking place in the Epistles. In the last chapter we considered the parable of the ten virgins in Matthew 25. Now we will see the growth of this parable in the book of Ephesians. In the parable of the ten virgins, we saw that the human spirit as God's lamp is burning with the Triune God as the oil. We saw also that the human soul is the vessel to contain an extra portion of the Triune God as the oil. In Ephesians both the spirit and the vessel have further growth and development.

THE SPIRIT AS THE SEAL

Ephesians 1:13 tells us that when we believed in the Lord Jesus, we received the Holy Spirit within us as the seal. This is very clear. The Holy Spirit is God Himself coming into us as the seal because, after believing in the Lord Jesus, we became God's possession. This seal is nothing less than the Triune God as the Spirit coming into us to seal us as His possession. This means that we have received the Holy Spirit into our spirit. Ephesians 2:1 and 5 tell us that before we were saved, we were dead. We were not dead in our body or in our soul, because both our body and our soul were very active before we believed in the Lord Jesus, but we were dead in our spirit. When the Holy Spirit came into us, our deadened spirit was made alive (v. 5). Our deadened and darkened spirit was made alive and was enlightened. Thus, our spirit was regenerated and is now burning with the oil of the Triune God. Now our spirit is alive and shining.

In Ephesians 1 Paul had the assurance that the Ephesian believers were already sealed with the Holy Spirit and that this Spirit was the earnest, the down payment, the foretaste, and the firstfruit of their coming inheritance. The sealing Spirit within us is the guarantee of our inheritance. Paul knew that the Holy Spirit had regenerated their spirit to make them living and

shining in spirit. But this did not mean that everything was all right. What about their soul? So Paul prayed for those who already had the Spirit of God in their human spirit, because they did not yet have the extra oil, the all-inclusive Spirit, in their soul—in their mind, emotion, and will. He prayed that their inner man, their regenerated spirit, might be strengthened.

MAKING HIS HOME IN OUR HEART

Because our spirit now has God's life in it, it has become a person. Our spirit is no longer simply an organ. Before we were saved, our spirit was just an organ without life; it was not a person. Our natural person or natural being was in the soul, and our spirit was an organ without a person. When Christ enters our spirit and gives life to our spirit, our spirit becomes the inner man. Therefore, the inner man is the regenerated human spirit indwelt by the Holy Spirit. Paul prayed that this inner man, this regenerated and quickened spirit, would be strengthened (3:16). This means that our regenerated spirit has to be filled with the Holy Spirit. When our spirit is filled with the Holy Spirit, it will be strong. The result of this strengthening will be that Christ will spread Himself from our spirit into every part of our heart. Christ will take full possession of our heart, meaning that He will settle Himself and make His home in our heart (v. 17). This is what it means to have the extra portion of oil in our vessel.

THE RENEWING OF OUR MIND

Ephesians 1 tells us that our lamp has been enlightened and is now shining. Ephesians 3 tells us we need an extra portion of the all-inclusive Spirit to fill up our soul, our heart, and every part of our inward being. Ephesians 4:23 says, "That you be renewed in the spirit of your mind." This means that the Spirit comes into our mind and becomes the spirit of our mind. We need the Spirit to become the spirit of our mind. This spirit in our mind is the renewing Spirit. This Spirit transforms us by pervading, saturating, and possessing our mind.

To be regenerated is to have our spirit enlightened, quickened, and made alive. After being regenerated in our spirit, we need to be transformed in our soul. Regeneration is God coming into our spirit; transformation is God saturating our soul. Our spirit is the center of our being, and surrounding our spirit is our soul. God's economy is to work Himself into us. God first comes

into our spirit and fills our spirit. Then He spreads Himself from our spirit into our soul, saturating our soul, possessing it, and fully making His home in it. It is in this way that we will be completely possessed, occupied, saturated, and mingled with God. This is regeneration plus transformation.

Never forget that regeneration is accomplished in our spirit and that transformation is accomplished in our soul. It is not sufficient just to be regenerated. That is only the beginning of the spiritual experience within us. Regeneration, the start of our spiritual life, means that God has come into our spirit to enlighten us, quicken us, and make us alive. After regeneration, we need to cooperate with the Lord, allowing Him to take a further step to spread Himself from our spirit into our soul, saturating our mind, emotion, and will. We may express this experience in several ways: it is to prepare the extra portion of the Triune God in our vessels; it is to have the transformation accomplished in our soul; it is to have our whole being mingled with the Triune God; and it is to become matured in the life of Christ.

From the book of Matthew we have seen that Christ as the seed has been sown into our spirit and that He will grow within us. Matthew 13 reveals that to have Christ grow in us means to have Him spread from our spirit into our heart, into all the inward parts of our being. This spreading of the seed is not only the growth but also the maturity. The seed that has been sown into our spirit will grow, spreading into our inward parts until it saturates our whole being and possesses all of our inward parts. When this is accomplished, we will be mature.

GOD'S ECONOMY

God's economy is to work Himself into us. He forgives our sins, justifies us, and saves us, but these items are not His goal. His goal is to work Himself into us. Forgiveness, justification, and salvation are all for His goal of working Himself into us.

This work is carried out in three steps. The first step is the regeneration of our spirit, the second is the transformation of our soul, and the third is the transfiguration of our body. We do not need to pay anything for regeneration. It is free. Likewise, we will not have to pay for the transfiguration of our body in the future. That also will be free. But by God's wisdom, we must pay something for the transformation of our soul. God will take these three steps

to thoroughly mingle Himself with our whole spirit, soul, and body. Because we have three parts, God needs three steps to saturate us. Therefore, we have the regeneration of the spirit, the transformation of the soul, and the transfiguration of the body.

PAYING THE PRICE

God is very wise, and He knows how to deal with us. God does not ask us to pay anything for the first step. Both the first step and the last step are free. However, we must pay for the second step. Although we are poor and have nothing worth selling, we nevertheless must pay something. For example, if the sisters would give up their love for shopping, the Lord Jesus would fill them up. Do not think that shopping is an insignificant thing. You cannot imagine how much the sisters are killed by their shopping! Suppose a sister is in a department store looking at a piece of material. The more she looks, the more the Lord within says, "Don't touch it." However, she continues to look at it and then buys it. For at least three days she will be unable to pray. However, if she would drop her buying, on the way home she would be shouting and praising the Lord, saying, "Hallelujah! Christ is Victor!" If you pay something, you will get something. If you pay the price of giving up shopping, you will gain more oil.

Sometimes it is easy for brothers to debate over doctrines and experiences. However, the more you debate, the more you lose. You must pay the price to give up debating. If you do this, immediately you will gain more oil. It is easy for the sisters to gossip and to talk about others. You need to pay the price of giving up gossiping. If you will give it up, you will gain more oil.

COOPERATING WITH THE LORD

If we are faithful in matters such as these, we will be giving the Lord the best cooperation. This means that we are opening ourselves to allow the Lord to spread into our being little by little. In this way He will saturate us, transform us, fill us, and make His home in our heart. We will gain an extra portion of oil in our vessel. Unfortunately, few Christians pay the price of offering the Lord the proper coordination. Although they may study the Bible or speak in tongues, they have little inward change and little inward transformation in life. Matthew, which is a book of seeds, does not emphasize teachings and gifts, and neither does such a basic book as Ephesians.

Eventually, in Revelation, the book of harvest, there are no teachings and gifts, but there is life. There is the river of life flowing and the tree of life growing. This flowing and growing of life requires our cooperation. The seed cannot grow without proper coordination. What is proper coordination? It simply means to eliminate the rocks, uproot the thorns, and make yourself the good ground. If you cooperate with the Lord, He will take the opportunity to spread Himself into every part of your being by the flowing of the river of life and the growing of the tree of life. By this you will be transformed, and the Triune God will saturate your whole inward being.

Actually, only one thing is crucial in God's economy: the Triune God working Himself into your being. Everything must serve God's intention of working Himself into our being and saturating us with the all-inclusive Spirit. First God enters our spirit, and then He spreads into our soul until finally we are matured in Christ as life. This maturity is the full coming, the full manifestation, of the kingdom.

THE KINGDOM

The book of Ephesians also mentions the kingdom. Ephesians 5:5 speaks of an inheritance in the kingdom. Although Ephesians is a book on the church, it also refers to the kingdom, because the proper church life is the reality of the kingdom. Do not follow the traditional teaching which says that the church is the church and the kingdom is the kingdom. We must not separate the church from the kingdom; they are two aspects of one thing. The genuine church life is the reality of the kingdom. If we are sealed with the Holy Spirit, filled with the Holy Spirit, and possessed by the Lord as the all-inclusive Spirit, then we are participating in the kingdom. We may put Ephesians 5:18b and 3:19b together: "Be filled in spirit...that you may be filled unto all the fullness of God." This means to be saturated thoroughly and fully with all the riches of God's element.

We need to pay the price for the Lord's transformation. This means that we must give up what we hold on to. Whatever you hold on to, that is the price you must pay. Some brothers hold on to their long hair. The problem is not the long hair itself: the problem is their holding on to long hair. It is the holding on to certain things that hinders our transformation. Whatever you hold on to is the price you must pay. You are holding on, but you must take your hands off. You should not hold on to anything. This is what it means to

pay the price. If we will pay the price, the Lord can spread within us, and we can be matured.

CHAPTER NINETEEN

TRANSFORMATION—ITS HARVEST IN THE BOOK OF REVELATION

Scripture Reading: 1 Cor. 3:9b; Rev. 12:10a; 14:1, 3-4, 14-16; 21:2, 10-11, 14, 18-19, 21; 22:1-2a

The seed of the kingdom is sown in Matthew, the sprouting of the seed takes place in Acts, and the growth occurs in the Epistles. Then in the book of Revelation there is the maturity, which is the harvest for the full coming of the kingdom. The book of Revelation presents the maturity, the harvest, the full coming, and the full manifestation of the kingdom. We have seen that the seed was sown in Matthew 13 and that it grew in 1 Corinthians 3. "I planted, Apollos watered, but God caused the growth" (v. 6). In 1 Corinthians 3 we also have seen the matter of transformation; the plants have been transformed into minerals. The life of the seed has metabolized the plant into precious materials useful for building. The gold, silver, and precious stones are materials for God's building. First Corinthians 3:9 reminds us that we are God's cultivated land and God's building. As God's cultivated land, we grow Christ. Whatever is grown is then metabolized into precious materials for God's building.

THE HARVEST OF TRANSFORMATION

Revelation 12:10 says, "Now has come...the kingdom of our God." What is the coming of the kingdom? The answer is found in Revelation 14. Revelation 14:1, 3, and 4 mention the firstfruits, the one hundred forty-four thousand. The number one hundred forty-four thousand is the product of twelve times twelve multiplied by one thousand. Please remember that twelve is composed of four times three, signifying the mingling of humanity with divinity. Now we have twelve times twelve multiplied a thousandfold. This means maturity among maturity. Thus, they are the firstfruits to God. Never forget that the seed is sown in Matthew 13 and grows in 1 Corinthians 3. The harvest is found in Revelation 14. Therefore, we have the seed, the growth, and the harvest. What is the harvest? The harvest is the coming of the kingdom, for Revelation 12:10 tells us that the kingdom has come.

When did the kingdom begin to come? In Matthew 3 the proclamation was made that the kingdom was near. However, it had not yet come. The kingdom began to come when the Lord Jesus appeared as the Sower to sow the seed, and it has been coming from that time. This coming is the growing and spreading of the seed. *Coming* means growing and spreading until maturity is reached. This maturity is the full coming of the kingdom; it is the harvest.

Regarding the harvest, the matter of primary importance is the firstfruits. If you read Leviticus 23, you will see that in God's economy He first has the harvest of the firstfruits. In a field some fruit will ripen earlier than the rest. The farmer will harvest this as the firstfruits. Sometime after the firstfruits have been harvested, the remainder of the crop will ripen. At that time there will be the full harvest. At the beginning, there are the firstfruits, and later there is the full harvest.

THE COMING OF THE LORD

The Bible says clearly that the Lord Jesus is with us all the days until the consummation of the age (Matt. 28:20). Since He is with us, how can He come in the future? Is He not here today? Since He is here already, how can He come? This is something wonderful, and it cannot be systematized. Never rely on your natural concepts when studying the Bible. Your natural concept cannot give you a proper understanding of the Bible. On the one hand, the Lord Jesus is here. On the other hand, He is coming. This means that He has already come as the seed, but He is coming and will come as the harvest. He has come as the seed, and He is coming as the seed grows. Eventually, He will come in full as the harvest. Although nearly two thousand years have passed, the Lord Jesus has not yet come because the seed has lacked the growth. Due to the shortage of growth, it is difficult for Him to have the harvest.

The coming of the Lord will not be a sudden occurrence. One day the Lord Jesus will come, but not in the way you have probably thought. The Lord Jesus will not merely come from the heavens but will come from within you. You are expecting Him to suddenly descend from the heavens. However, you must realize that He will come out of you. But when the Lord Jesus comes out of you, He will not leave you. To all the unbelievers, He will descend from the heavens. But to us, the believers, He will not come from the heavens—He will come out of us.

How else can we interpret the statements that the Lord is with us and that He is also coming. The Lord has come into us, He is growing within us, and He is transforming us by performing a metabolic work within us. His coming is the completion of this work of transformation. The Lord will not merely come out of heaven; He will come out of us.

Together with Brother Watchman Nee we have considered all the schools of theology. We worked together, talked together, and fellowshipped what we had read. In this way we helped one another, and we came to know all these matters. We do know where we stand, and we do know what the Lord has committed to us. We read many of the books about the Lord's second coming, studying the schools of pretribulation and posttribulation, premillennial and postmillennial. We also studied the different views about the rapture: the partial rapture, the pretribulation rapture, and the posttribulation rapture.

By the Lord's grace and for the sake of His recovery, He has shown us this mysterious way—that His coming back is not according to our concept. According to our natural concept, the Lord sits on the throne watching and bestowing blessings until the day when He will suddenly appear. Nearly every theological book speaks of the coming of the Lord in this way. But the Lord Jesus is coming by the growth of life, not by a sudden appearance from the heavens. I know that you may quote Philippians 3:20, which says that we are waiting for the Lord Jesus to come from the heavens. But you must also read Matthew 28:20, which says that the Lord is with us all the days. I cannot tell you how much time we have spent studying these two verses. How can you reconcile them? You simply cannot do it. However, it is a fact that the Lord Jesus has sown Himself into us and that He is now growing within us, transforming us, and becoming matured within us. When He has ripened and matured within and through us, that will be the time of His coming. To us, His coming will not be a sudden event.

WATCHING AND PRAYING BY GROWING

Many Christians talk about watching and praying, but few realize the real meaning of watching and praying. The way to watch is simply to grow in Christ. No one can be watchful without the proper growth. While you are growing, you are watching. While you are growing, you are preparing the extra portion of the all-inclusive Spirit as the oil in your vessel. This is what it means to be watchful. To be watchful does not mean that you read the

prophecies, study the world situation, and observe the events in Russia, Israel, and the Middle East. Watching is not a matter of reading newspapers and collecting prophecies. If this is your way of watching, I am afraid that the Lord Jesus will come one day and that you will not know it. To be watchful means to grow with the Lord Jesus. You need to pray, "Lord Jesus, I am going to the department store. Will You go with me? I am going shopping. Will You go with me?" If the Lord says, "No, I want to stay home," you should reply, "Lord, if You want to stay home, I will stay home too." This is watching. "O Lord Jesus, I need to get a haircut. Lord, how long do You want my hair to be? I am one with You. Whatever You like, that is what I like." This is what it means to be watchful.

When I was young, I was taught to watch and pray. I was taught to observe certain events such as the return of Jerusalem to the Jews and then to pray about them. I watched and then I prayed. But now I realize that to watch and to pray means to grow continually with the Lord, to live together with Him. Then you are in the kingdom. You are not only in the kingdom, but you are the kingdom. As you grow together with the Lord, you watch and pray. The Lord Jesus is with us, and His being with us is His gradual coming.

Revelation 14 reveals the maturity among all the maturities, signified by the number one hundred forty-four thousand. Some will be like this. I believe that many in the local churches will be mature, but some will be at the top of this maturity. This topmost maturity will be considered by God to be the one hundred forty-four thousand who will be the firstfruits. After this comes the harvest.

THE WAY OF LIFE

I beg you to take all these things into your spirit and bring them to the Lord in prayer. You will see this as the accurate realization of the New Testament. It is not simply a matter of interpretation of prophecies. We have studied all the good schools of prophetic interpretation. Probably some of you are familiar with G. H. Pember's books on the great prophecies. We, too, are familiar with them. However, those books simply contain doctrines of prophecies; there is not much life there. What the Lord has shown us from His Word is the way of life. Even the Lord's second coming is according to the way of life. He is the seed, He is the growth, He is the transformation, and He

is even the harvest and the firstfruits. Whoever gains Him the most will be at the top of the harvest and will be the firstfruits.

TRANSFORMATION

Revelation 14:14-16 tells us that the Lord harvested the wheat. However, at the end of the book of Revelation, in the New Jerusalem, there is no wheat. In Revelation 14 the Lord Jesus harvested much wheat, but ultimately what became of it? All the wheat became gold, pearls, and precious stones. In Revelation 14 there are the firstfruits and the harvest; in Revelation 21 there are gold, pearls, and precious stones. The wheat has been transformed. In chapter 14 there is the harvest out of the growth; in chapter 21 there is the transformation of the wheat. The wheat becomes precious stones through transformation just as wood becomes stone as a result of being petrified. Are we wheat or precious stones? On the one hand, we are wheat, and on the other hand, we are among the precious stones. We are God's cultivated land, growing wheat, and we are God's building, composed of all the precious stones.

Eventually, the Lord's harvest will become a city. The harvest of wheat in Revelation 14 will become the city in Revelation 21. In the harvest we can see the growth of life, but in the city we can see the transformation of life. Along with transformation there is building. Growth without transformation does not produce any building. However, with growth and transformation there is a building, a corporate Body.

A CITY FULL OF LIFE

The pure word of the Bible presents the Lord Jesus as the all-inclusive seed. There is the growth of the seed, the transformation of the seed, the maturity of the seed, and the ultimate consummation of the spreading of the seed in the holy city. The New Jerusalem is built with transformed materials. This is the kingdom. Within this city there is nothing but life: the tree of life grows in the river of life, and the river of life flows out of the throne of God and of the Lamb. Life is the unique way that we must take. We all must be on the same street, the same way of life, with the water flowing and the tree growing. This will not only produce the building of God, but it will also sustain the building of God for eternity. For eternity, the building of God will be sustained by the flowing of life and the growing of life. Today we may experience a foretaste of

the full taste. The local church is a miniature of God's kingdom, with the life flowing to produce and sustain a building composed of precious materials. In the kingdom there is one life, one way, and one expression.

EXPRESSING GOD

The entire city has the appearance of jasper, which means it has the appearance of God (Rev. 4:3). In the church life there is also one life, one way, and one expression. Regardless of the number of local churches, the way is one because the life is one. Therefore, the expression is also uniquely one. There should be no expression of either you or me. There should be no expression of Chinese or American philosophies. There should be no expression of doctrines or gifts. The city only expresses the image of God. Within the life of God there is the essence and the shaping. In the life essence of God, we receive the life regulation. Eventually, we will all be shaped into the image of God. We will not be according to our kind; we will be according to God's kind. In Genesis 1 the vegetable life and the animal life are each after its own kind. We will not be after our kind but after God's kind, bearing His image and expressing Him. All the local churches must have only one life, one way, and one expression. This one expression is not in doctrine or in teaching or in spiritual gifts. It is in Christ as the all-inclusive life.

CHAPTER TWENTY

BAPTIZED INTO THE TRIUNE GOD

Scripture Reading: Matt. 28:19, 20b; Gal. 3:27; Rom. 6:3; 1 Cor. 12:13; 2 Cor. 1:21-22; 3:17a, 18; Eph. 6:17-18; John 6:63; Rev. 3:1; 21:6; 22:17

The book of Matthew begins with a wonderful person. He is the issue of many human generations mingled with the Triune God. Such a wonderful person was proclaimed to people as the kingdom. He Himself was preached as the kingdom. This wonderful person was preached as the seed of the kingdom and was sown into the earth of humanity. Out of this seed the kingdom will grow until it reaches maturity, the full manifestation of the kingdom.

Both Matthew 13 and 25 are very crucial and strategic chapters. Matthew 13 tells us that this wonderful person has sown Himself into us as the seed of the kingdom and that this seed grows and produces transformed material—a treasure and pearls. The following chapters reveal that these transformed items are for the building up of the church, which is the reality of the kingdom. Chapter 25 tells us that everyone who is in the kingdom is likened to a virgin. We are neither robbers nor gentlemen; we are virgins. Whether we are males or females, we are all virgins holding a burning lamp and going forth out of this world to meet our Bridegroom. However, we need to gain an extra portion of the Triune God to fill our vessel, our soul. Our need today is an extra portion of the all-inclusive Spirit as the oil. This means that all the inward parts of our being must be filled, occupied, and saturated by the Lord. This will bring us to maturity and will make us ready for His coming. We will be prepared for the full manifestation of the kingdom.

This must be a controlling vision to all the churches today. It should not be taken as mere knowledge or doctrine. This must be a vision that governs the church life. Every aspect of the church life should be continually governed by this vision. Under His grace and by His mercy I can testify that I am under this vision. This vision has become not merely a doctrine but a governing principle to me.

BAPTIZED INTO THE TRIUNE GOD

Now we come to the end of the book of Matthew. This book ends with the command to baptize people into the Triune God and with the Lord's promise that He will be with us all the days until the consummation of this age (28:19-20). These verses are profound and all-inclusive. We all must realize that we have been baptized into the Triune God. To be baptized into the Triune God simply means to be put into the Triune God. In Matthew 28:19 the Triune God is likened to the water of baptism. When we baptize people into water, this signifies that we put them into the Triune God.

In Matthew 28:19 the King James Version uses the phrase *in the name*. Under the influence of this translation, many Christian teachers think that to baptize people into the Triune God is simply a ritual or a form. Some even argue about the proper name in which to baptize people, whether in the name of the Triune God, in the name of the Lord Jesus, or in the name of Christ Jesus. The arguments over this point have even caused some divisions. Several years ago, while I was in the Philippines, a dear brother who loved the Lord and was seeking the Lord came to me with a good intention, saying, "Brother Lee, I know that you people practice immersion. I would like to know in what name you immerse people. Do you baptize them in the name of the Lord Jesus, in the name of Jesus Christ, or in the name of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Ghost?" I asked the brother what he meant. He answered, "There is a big difference in which name you baptize people." I asked him, "In what name do you baptize people?" He replied, "We baptize people in the name of the Lord Jesus. It is wrong to baptize people in the name of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Ghost. It is also wrong to baptize people in the name of Christ Jesus. You must baptize people in the name of the Lord Jesus." I said, "Brother, you are altogether too much. I beg you to forget about all these things. Whether you baptize people in the name of Jesus Christ or in the name of Christ Jesus or in the name of the Lord Jesus or in the name of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit, does not really matter. As long as you are putting people into God, it is wonderful." He said, "No brother. It is not a small thing. You must realize that here in the Philippines some churches practice baptism in the name of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Ghost. We practice baptizing people in the name of the Lord Jesus." I replied, "Brother, there is no doubt that you are just a strange, peculiar sect. I must speak the truth." We must see that it is not a matter of baptizing people in a certain name.

Once when I was in Houston, I spoke on this subject and even demonstrated how a pastor might baptize people in the name of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Ghost. Afterward, a Southern Baptist pastor who was in the meeting came up to me and said, "Brother, the message was wonderful, but you were mocking me." I answered, "Brother, I have no intention of mocking you or anyone else. I am simply telling the truth to the Lord's people that baptism should not be a ritual or a form. It must be a fact."

What should we do with a person who has recently believed in the Lord Jesus? We must put him into the Triune God. We must baptize him into the Triune God. Then he will be a person in the Triune God. Whenever we baptize people, we must exercise faith based upon the Lord's clear and faithful word. The Lord said, "Go therefore and disciple all the nations, baptizing them into the name..." The Greek preposition here should not be translated "in" but "into." The Lord told us to baptize people into the name of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit. Since the Lord has given us such a faithful word, we must stand upon this word with full faith and authority. Whenever we baptize people, we must do it in a living way. We stand on the word of the Lord to baptize people into the Triune God.

BAPTIZED INTO CHRIST

Galatians 3:27 says, "As many of you as were baptized into Christ have put on Christ." This is a wonderful verse. It does not say, "baptized *in* Christ," but, "baptized *into* Christ." There is a great difference! We have not been baptized *in* Christ but *into* Christ. As many as were baptized into Christ have put on Christ. If you were baptized into Christ, you surely have put on Christ.

The same concept is expressed in Romans 6:3: "Or are you ignorant that all of us who have been baptized into Christ Jesus have been baptized into His death?" We have been baptized into Christ Jesus, and now we have Christ Jesus covering us. We have put on Christ. Is this a form or a ritual conducted according to a vain word? Absolutely not! This is a reality accomplished by the faithful word of the Lord.

However, we still have a problem. You have been baptized into Christ, and now you have Christ upon you, but when were you baptized into Christ? At what time and in what place were you placed into Christ? Actually, it is very difficult to say. One thing is clear: we have the full assurance that we have

been baptized into Christ. We may not know when it happened or where it happened, but we do know that it has happened. After we believed in the Lord Jesus, we were baptized into Christ. We simply do not know when or where, but we can testify that we have been baptized into Christ.

Some may reply that they are clear about the exact time and place they were baptized into Christ. While they were praying, something suddenly happened to them, and they were baptized. Although I do not criticize this kind of realization, I beg you never to make your experience a standard for others. If you read the New Testament, you will find many different occasions of the baptism of the Spirit, with no two occasions being exactly the same. Every occasion was unique. Many of us have the assurance that we have been put into the Triune God. Many times I have experienced that I am really in the Triune God. This is not simply knowledge; it is real, and I have experienced it.

In 1935, before I ever spoke in tongues, I had an experience of being in the Triune God. While I was ministering on a Lord's Day afternoon, something similar to a cloud descended upon me and overshadowed me. I felt it and could almost see it with my eyes. Suddenly my speaking changed. It was not changed into tongue-speaking, for I continued to speak Chinese, but the whole congregation knew that something had happened. I have no words to describe that occurrence. There was no speaking in tongues and nothing miraculous happened, yet all the people had the deep conviction that the Lord was there. That was a genuine experience of being in the Triune God.

I had another such experience in the early days of January 1943. During the meeting I was standing on the platform. A song had been called, and the whole congregation, numbering more than five hundred people, was singing. Suddenly, the entire congregation began to sob. No one cried or wept loudly, but everyone sobbed with tears. My own tears came, and I simply could not sing. Everyone in the congregation experienced this. While we were singing, we were sobbing. With both the young and the old, the sobbing was mingled with singing. We did not know how to describe this. Some testified that they simply came into the meeting place and were caught by the Lord. There was no need for them to listen to a message.

Moreover, I can never forget another Lord's Day afternoon meeting in 1943. After we had sung a hymn and before I gave the message, I began to pray. That prayer lasted more than half an hour. I prayed with just one

word—*Shake! Shake! Shake!* I spoke in regular Chinese, not in tongues, but all the words came forth like the waters of Niagara Falls. “Shake our families! Shake our homes! Shake our country!” I was standing as I prayed, but I did not ask the people to stand. However, after a time all the people stood up, and one of the brothers came from his seat and held up my arms because I had raised them up as I prayed. This was a real experience of being in the Triune God.

Many Pentecostal friends say that according to 1 Corinthians 12, there are nine manifestations of the Holy Spirit. But actually there are many more, because among the nine manifestations listed in 1 Corinthians 12, there is no mention of dreams. Dreams are mentioned in Acts 2, where it says that in the last days God will pour out of His Spirit upon all flesh, and men shall dream things in dreams (v. 17). I have had real experiences of dreams in the Holy Spirit. Within a period of two months in 1943, I had a series of four dreams. Before I was imprisoned by the Japanese military police, who had invaded China during the war, I had a dream. On the very day that I was imprisoned, the dream came to me again, and after three weeks another dream came. All these dreams were completely fulfilled. The Lord comforted me by the dreams. Even before the Japanese military police came to arrest me, I knew through the dreams what was going to happen. The night I was arrested and imprisoned, another dream came. In the dream the Lord told me, “Be at peace. You will not be hurt.” It happened exactly according to the dream. Praise the Lord!

These experiences are signs proving that God has put us into Himself. As believers in Christ, we have all been put into the Triune God. But do not try to systematize this experience. To argue about which name to use when baptizing people is to systematize. To insist upon speaking in tongues is also to systematize. I am not against baptizing in the name of the Lord Jesus, and I am not against speaking in tongues, but I am strongly against systematizing. We must forget about every kind of systematizing.

Do not be so bold to tell people that you know when you were put into the Triune God. You may feel a certain way, but probably the real experience does not actually correspond to your feeling. You may feel that it happened in San Francisco in 1971, but it might have happened a few weeks earlier. We cannot trust our sensations; they simply are not accurate. For example, I may feel cold when the temperature is over 90 degrees. This is my sensation, but it is

not the fact. Forget about your sensations, and take the fact according to the clear, definite, and faithful word of the Lord: "Go therefore and disciple all the nations, baptizing them into the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit" (Matt. 28:19).

In the churches we need to have faith in the faithful word of the Lord Jesus when we baptize people. According to His word, we baptize people, putting them into the Triune God. Do not think that the Triune God means that we have three Gods—one called God the Father, the second called God the Son, and the third called God the Holy Spirit. This is a wrong impression received from the traditional teachings concerning the Trinity. We do not have three Gods; we have one God, one all-inclusive God. We have one God who is the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit.

We can never fully understand the Triune God. In fact, we cannot even fully understand ourselves. Although we have a spirit, a heart, a mind, an emotion, and a will, we do not understand them very well. If we cannot even understand ourselves, how can we understand the Triune God? Our God is one God who is the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit. We cannot understand Him, but we have Him, and we are in Him.

In an earlier chapter I referred to a portion in Andrew Murray's book *The Spirit of Christ*. Let us consider that paragraph once again: "In the Father we have the unseen God, the Author of all. In the Son God revealed, made manifest, and brought nigh; He is the Form of God. In the Spirit of God we have the indwelling God: the Power of God dwelling in human body and working in it what the Father and Son have for us...what the Father has purposed and the Son has procured, can be appropriated and take effect in the members of Christ who are still here in the flesh, only through the continual intervention and active operation of the Holy Spirit." I do agree with this word. This is the Triune God. To be baptized into the Triune God simply means to be put into such a wonderful and all-inclusive God. Then the Lord Jesus—Jehovah-plus and God-plus—will be with us all the days until the consummation of the age (Matt. 28:20). Hallelujah!

This is the kingdom. We have been put into the Triune God, and we have put on the Triune God. The Lord Jesus who is Jehovah-plus and God-plus is with us all the days until the consummation of this age. This is the conclusion

of the book of Matthew. Matthew ends by putting us into the Triune God, who will be with us all the days. We need such a vision to govern and control us.

BAPTIZED INTO THE BODY

In Matthew 28 there is the seed of baptism into the Triune God, and in the Epistles there is the growth of the seed. We have already referred to Romans 6:3, which says that we have been baptized into Christ Jesus. First Corinthians 12:13 tells us two things: "In one Spirit we were all baptized into one Body." It is not simply a matter of being put into the Triune God. Once we have been put into the Triune God, we become the Body. The charismatic movement stresses speaking in tongues but neglects the point that the genuine baptism in the Holy Spirit is to produce the Body. If you have had a genuine experience of the baptism in the Holy Spirit, you will be for the Body. You will not be content with individuality; you will care for the Body. Not every experience of speaking in tongues is genuine. If the experience is genuine, the person will care for the Body. The real baptism in the Spirit is for the producing of the Body. The Body is a strong test as to whether or not the baptism we have experienced is genuine.

According to Matthew 13, the seed grows and brings in transformation, and transformation issues in the building. What is the building? The building is the Body. Although I have no intention of criticizing anyone, I must speak the truth to say that many tongue-speaking people do not have the transformation in life. I saw many who were the same in China. Three times we practiced Pentecostalism in our churches, and each time it was a debit to our spiritual accounting. We did have some credit, but eventually our spiritual accounting was "in the red," showing more debit than credit. We suffered a loss. Eventually, all the co-workers spontaneously made the decision to drop the practice. We did not continue that "business" because it gave a poor return. I should not say that there is no profit in the Pentecostal things, but the loss is greater than the gain. Both in China and in this country I have seen the damage caused by the "Pentecostal" things.

TESTS OF THE GENUINE BAPTISM

The genuine baptism in the Holy Spirit must be checked by several points: the growth in life, the transformation in life, the building up in life, and the practical Body life. Satan is very subtle. No one will attempt to cheat you with

counterfeit money that is obviously false, but they will use a counterfeit currency so similar to real currency that only experts can discern the difference. Therefore, the best protection is not to accept currency at all but to accept only gold. Do not think that you are smart enough to discern the counterfeit from the true. Few of us are that smart. Therefore, in the long run and for the safety of the church, it is better not to take any "currency." Just take the gold. Some may occasionally take the "currency." But you must warn them not to use "currency" too much or they will be cheated. This is true not only for tongue-speaking but also for all the other gifts. The gift of knowledge must also be proved by the growth in life, the transformation in life, the building in life, and the practical Body life.

This is not only the situation today; it was also the situation when the Lord Jesus was on the earth. John 2 tells us that the Lord did many miracles in Jerusalem and, as a result of these signs, many people believed in Him. However, He did not commit Himself to those who were drawn by the miracles. In John 3 Nicodemus came, and the Lord turned him to the matter of life, saying that he needed to be born again. It is not a matter of miracles but of being born again. When Nicodemus came to the Lord Jesus, his concept was that of knowledge, and he called the Lord "Rabbi." "Rabbi, we know that You have come from God as a teacher" (v. 2). But the Lord Jesus told him, "You must be born anew" (v. 7). It is not a matter of miracles or of knowledge; it is a matter of receiving a new life by rebirth. The local churches need one thing: life with its growth, transformation, and building. Eventually, this life will produce the Body.

BAPTISM AND DRINKING

"In one Spirit we were all baptized into one Body...and were all given to drink one Spirit" (1 Cor. 12:13). Here we have another aspect: drinking of the Spirit. To be baptized in the Spirit means that you are put into the Spirit; to drink of the Spirit means that the Spirit is put into you. These are two aspects. On the one hand, we have to be put into the Spirit. On that day when I was speaking and something descended and overshadowed me, I was put into the Spirit. However, I still need to take the Spirit into me, to drink of the Spirit daily and hourly. Even as we must drink water every day, we need to drink of the Spirit again and again. To have the churches as the kingdom of God is not a matter of doctrine, knowledge, gifts, or miracles. It is altogether a matter of

drinking of the Holy Spirit. When you pray, you should drink of the Spirit. When you read the Bible, you should also drink of the Spirit.

Ephesians 6:17 reads: "Receive...the sword of the Spirit, which Spirit is the word of God." The relative pronoun *which* refers to the Spirit. Receive the sword of the Spirit, which (Spirit) is the word of God, by means of all prayer (v. 18). We should not consider the word of God in the Bible merely as letters in black and white. We must take it as the Spirit. In John 6:63 the Lord Jesus said, "The words which I have spoken to you are spirit." Since His words are spirit, we should not just read them as black and white letters. We must take the Word of God by means of all prayer. This is why we need to pray-read the Bible. Ephesians 6:17-18 is a base, a ground, in the Bible for pray-reading the Word. It tells us to take the word of God, the living word which is the Spirit, by means of all prayer. We need to pray every word. By praying we will make every word of the Bible something of the Spirit. This is what it means to drink of the Spirit. To call, "O Lord Jesus!" is to drink of the Spirit. To pray the Word is also to drink of the Spirit.

We must realize that the Triune God is the Spirit. Do not think that the Father is the Father, the Son is the Son, and the Spirit is the Spirit as separate persons. These three are the all-inclusive Spirit. Second Corinthians 3:17 declares, "The Lord is the Spirit." Second Corinthians 1:21-22 says that we have been firmly attached unto the anointed One. The anointed One is Christ, and He is the all-inclusive Spirit. We have been anointed and sealed and have been given the Spirit as the pledge, the guarantee. The anointing gives us the taste of God. By being anointed we receive the essence, the element, of God. By being sealed we have the image of God. By having the pledge, we have the taste of God. We have the element of God, the image of God, and the taste of God. Hallelujah! All this is related to the all-inclusive Spirit, who is the Lord Himself. By the all-inclusive Spirit we are filled, saturated, and mingled with God.

The result is that we are transformed. For this to be fully accomplished, we need to have our face unveiled (2 Cor. 3:18). To be unveiled means to be without a cover. If you read 2 Corinthians 3, you will realize that the veil mentioned there is the Scriptures in black and white letters. I am concerned that many Christians are still veiled by the Bible. Others are veiled by their charismatic experiences or by some other experiences. We need the Lord's mercy to remove all the veils and to give us an unveiled face, without concepts,

ideas, and preoccupations. We need to be unveiled and to gaze upon Him as the all-inclusive Spirit. Then we will be transformed into His image.

THE CONSUMMATION

Now we come to the harvest in the book of Revelation. We have seen the seed in Matthew and the growth in the Epistles. The harvest of the Spirit in the book of Revelation is the seven Spirits and the sevenfold intensified Spirit. Every local church needs the sevenfold intensified Spirit for the seven stars. All the leading ones in the local churches must realize the need for this intensified Spirit. In Revelation 21:6 the Lord said, “I am the Alpha and the Omega, the Beginning and the End. I will give to him who thirsts from the spring of the water of life freely.” The Spirit and the bride are one, and they say come to drink the water of life freely (22:17). This is our need today. Forget the forms, the rituals, the doctrines, the gifts, and the miracles. Forget everything, and come and drink of the water of life. This is the consummation of being baptized into the Triune God and of drinking the Spirit.

CHAPTER TWENTY-ONE

PRINCIPLES OF THE KINGDOM (1)

Scripture Reading: Matt. 8:1-3, 5-13; 9:9-17

Matthew is the New Testament book that deals specifically with the matter of the kingdom. In nearly every chapter the central point is the kingdom. The Gospel of John, on the other hand, emphasizes life. By comparing these two Gospels, we can see that the cases selected and presented in each of them are absolutely different because John stresses life and Matthew stresses the kingdom. Neither Gospel tells us everything that the Lord Jesus did while He was on earth. This would have been impossible (John 21:25). John tells us that the Lord Jesus did many things that are not recorded in his Gospel. The cases he recorded illustrate that Christ is life to people and that He can meet every human need by life (20:30-31). In Matthew, however, the cases do not illustrate life; they illustrate the kingdom. Matthew does not mention Nicodemus, the Samaritan woman, or the resurrection of Lazarus. These are found in John because they are excellent illustrations of how Christ is life to needy people. Matthew includes other cases, such as the cleansing of the leper, which John does not include. Thus, the cases in Matthew illustrate the matter of the kingdom, whereas the cases in John illustrate the matter of life.

The book of Matthew was not written according to the historical sequence of events. Another Gospel, Mark, presents a historical record of the sequence of events in the life of the Lord Jesus. Matthew, on the other hand, assembles various materials together in order to present a particular picture or revelation. Matthew's purpose is not to present a chronological sequence of events. Some incidents that occurred later in the Lord's life, Matthew mentions earlier, and some events that occurred earlier, he mentions later. He does this to show us a picture. The whole book is a picture of the kingdom.

The first aspect of the kingdom that Matthew shows is the seed of the kingdom. Chapter 1 presents not only the King of the kingdom but also the seed of the kingdom. There is no doubt that the Lord Jesus is the King, yet this King is also the seed of the kingdom. To say that the Lord Jesus is only the King is too objective. We must see that the Lord Jesus is not only the King of the kingdom but also the seed. This is subjective. This seed is a wonderful

person who has been sown into us. As we mentioned previously, Christ is the issue of many human generations mingled with the Triune God. He is Jehovah-plus and God-plus.

Chapter 2 continues by showing who are the proper persons to receive this seed. Then chapter 3 presents the beginning of the preaching of the kingdom. In chapter 4 we are told what kind of people the Lord Jesus called into the kingdom. He did not go to the religious center or to the temple to call the religious people. He did not call scholars, priests, scribes, or lawyers. Rather, He went to the fishing wharf and called some young people who were simple fishermen. After three and a half years these young fishermen became the pillars of the first local church on earth, the church in Jerusalem.

Then in chapters 5 through 7, those called by the Lord Jesus followed Him to the mountaintop. There He gave them a definition of the real kingdom life. In this discourse the Lord Jesus described the reality of the kingdom. Chapter 8, which presents the first case illustrating the kingdom recorded in Matthew, begins after the Lord's descent from the mountain. Let us now consider this first case.

THE FIRST CASE—THE LEPER

The first case concerns a leper who came to the Lord Jesus asking to be cleansed (vv. 1-4). It is very significant that this case is mentioned first. No doubt Matthew deliberately recorded it first. According to Leviticus 13 and 14, it was quite difficult for a leper to be cleansed. But in Matthew 8 it was very easy: the leper simply came, asked the Lord Jesus to cleanse him, and He did it. What does this signify? It signifies that all who would participate in the kingdom are lepers. You must realize that you are a leper. We are all lepers. But Hallelujah! The Lord Jesus can build up His kingdom with cleansed lepers! The Lord Jesus can establish the kingdom of the heavens with and among cleansed lepers. In other words, He can change lepers into heavenly citizens.

Do you not have the sense within that you are a leper? Do not think that all the people who enter into the kingdom of the heavens are marvelous. No! They are lepers. You need to realize that unless you are a leper you have no share in the kingdom of the heavens. The kingdom of the heavens does not call saints; it calls lepers. This realization will truly humble us. We all must

humble ourselves and say, “Lord Jesus, by my natural birth I am not worthy of Your kingdom. By nature I am an unclean leper.”

No one except the Lord Jesus can cleanse the lepers. We are all lepers, but we have been cleansed by His blood and by His life. According to Leviticus 14, the cleansing of leprosy required the blood of a bird and water. The blood represents the blood of the Lord Jesus, and the water represents His life. We are cleansed by His blood and by His life. First Corinthians 6:9-11 says that the unclean people—in a sense, we may call them lepers—have no inheritance in the kingdom. However, we should remember the *but*. “But you were washed, but you were sanctified, but you were justified.” Today, by the Lord’s redemption, we are no longer lepers; we are citizens of the heavenly kingdom. The first case recorded by Matthew indicates that the citizens of the kingdom of the heavens are lepers who have been cleansed.

THE SECOND CASE—THE CENTURION

Now we come to the second case, also not found in the Gospel of John. This is the case of a Roman centurion, a Gentile, whose servant was sick (Matt. 8:5-13). The centurion asked the Lord Jesus to come and heal his servant. When the Lord Jesus indicated His willingness to come, the centurion said, “Lord, I am not fit for You to enter under my roof; but only speak a word, and my servant will be healed. For I also am a man under authority, having soldiers under me. And I say to this one, Go, and he goes; and to another, Come, and he comes; and to my slave, Do this, and he does it” (vv. 8-9). This is very meaningful. It indicates that the centurion recognized that the Lord Jesus had real authority over heaven and earth. This case regarding authority is found in Matthew because it illustrates the kingdom. The kingdom is the authority of the Lord Jesus. At the end of Matthew, the Lord Jesus said, “All authority has been given to Me in heaven and on earth. Go therefore and disciple all the nations” (28:18-19). When we go out to preach the gospel, we must go with the authority of the Lord Jesus. All authority is in His hands.

The case of the centurion illustrates faith. The people in the kingdom must be people of faith. What is faith? It is difficult to define faith. Although there is a definition of faith in Hebrews 11:1, we may read it several times and still not understand what faith is. Stated simply, faith is the realization of what the Lord Jesus is. Whenever you realize the Lord Jesus in a certain way, spontaneously you have faith as a result of that realization. The centurion said

that there was no need for the Lord Jesus to come to his house, because he realized that He was the highest authority. All authority was in His hand. If He would say the word, everything would be well. This is faith. This is an illustration of realizing what the Lord Jesus is.

The people in the kingdom first are lepers, and then they are believers. To be a leper means to be unclean; to be a believer means to be a person of faith in the Lord Jesus. On the one hand, we are lepers; on the other hand, we have a certain realization of the Lord Jesus. Realization is faith. Some people say that it is hard to believe, or to have faith. But actually, once you have a realization of something, it is more difficult not to believe. If you say it is difficult to have faith, it means that you do not know what faith is. Faith is the realization of a certain thing. If you have ever seen or realized what the Lord Jesus is, it will be difficult for you *not* to believe in Him. Likewise, some say that it is easy to stumble and fall, but really it is difficult to fall. How many times have you fallen during the last thirty days? I have not fallen for a number of years. Actually, it is easier to stand than to fall. If you try to fall, you will find it difficult. In the same way, it is not difficult to have faith. Do not accept the lie that it is hard to believe. We all must declare, "Hallelujah! It is easy for us to believe." It is easier to believe than not to believe. Even if the heavens were to disappear and the earth were removed, I could not help believing. Can you give up your faith? Can you stop believing in the Lord Jesus? If you tried to give up your faith and to stop believing in Him, refusing to be a Christian anymore, you would find that you simply could not do it. Hallelujah! We all have faith.

The citizens of the kingdom are people of faith, not people who are qualified by natural birth. Nothing from our natural birth counts for the kingdom. The Lord Jesus said that many will come from the east and the west to be in the kingdom of the heavens, but the sons of the kingdom, those who are Jewish by their natural birth, will have no part in the kingdom (Matt. 8:11-12). This shows that the entrance into the kingdom of the heavens does not depend upon our natural birth. No one is qualified to enter the kingdom by his natural birth. It does not matter whether you were born nice or tough, slow or quick. Whatever you have by nature means nothing as far as the kingdom is concerned. You must be a person of faith.

These cases illustrate some basic principles. The case of the leper illustrates that we are all unclean. The case of the centurion illustrates faith, including

the principle that we are not qualified or disqualified by our natural birth. The only thing that matters is faith, and faith is the realization of what the Lord Jesus is. The more we look unto Him, consider Him, and trust Him, the more we are in the kingdom and become citizens of the kingdom.

Both the cleansed lepers and the people who by natural birth have no share in the kingdom can receive the wonderful matter called faith. It simply comes. It is difficult to tell how it comes or from where it comes. Perhaps you and your classmates listened to the same gospel message. They did not receive faith, but you did. And once you have received it, you can never rid yourself of it. Day after day, it will bother you. You may even try to cast it away, but you cannot. What is the source of such faith? Acts 13:48 reveals that having faith proves we have been predestinated by God. Before the foundation of the world God predestinated you and marked you out. If you try to escape or flee from this faith, you cannot, because you have been predestinated. I have no doubt that you have been predestinated. That is why you believed when you heard the message of the gospel. Actually, you were chosen before you were even born. Even if you tried to give up the Christian faith, you would be unable to do so because God chose you before you were born. Thus, you have faith. The source of faith is God's predestination. We all have such faith, and we all are citizens of the kingdom. Although none of us are qualified to enter the kingdom by our natural birth, we may enter by faith. We have become citizens of the kingdom of the heavens by faith.

THE THIRD CASE—A TAX COLLECTOR

The tax collector in Matthew 9 is a case that further illustrates the kingdom. Verse 9 says that Matthew was a publican, a tax collector, a Jew who collected taxes for the Roman imperialists. Such publicans were despised by the Jews because they were helping the Roman imperialists to damage the Jewish nation. Matthew was such a person. Spiritually speaking, he was a leper who was cleansed. Although his natural situation was that of a leper, he received faith. The leprosy went and faith came, so the Lord Jesus went to feast with him. The feast mentioned in verse 10, the great reception of Luke 5:29, was prepared by Matthew. Matthew held a great feast to celebrate his entrance into the kingdom. This was certainly a worthwhile celebration, for a publican had entered into the kingdom. While the Lord Jesus was enjoying the feast, the religious people who had so many regulations were troubled. Both the old-time religionists, the disciples of the Pharisees, and the new-time

religionists, the disciples of John the Baptist, were troubled (Matt. 9:11-14). They were all offended because the Lord Jesus was feasting with tax collectors and sinners. Hence, the Lord Jesus told them that the strong have no need of a physician, but those who are ill. He also told them that He desires mercy and not sacrifice, for He did not come to call the righteous but sinners (vv. 10-13).

At that time John's disciples also asked the Lord a question: "Why do we and the Pharisees fast much, but Your disciples do not fast?" The Lord answered them in a wonderful way: "The sons of the bridechamber cannot mourn as long as the bridegroom is with them, can they?" (v. 15). A bridegroom is always a very pleasant person. As the seed of the kingdom, the Lord Jesus is not only the Savior, Lord, and King, but also the Bridegroom. He is very pleasant. How strange it would be for people to fast on the wedding day, especially in the presence of the bridegroom. That would be an insult and a shame to the bridegroom himself. In the presence of the bridegroom we must have enjoyment. The more we enjoy ourselves, the happier the bridegroom will be. We all need to enjoy the Lord.

The first case, the leper, signifies cleansing; the second case, the centurion, signifies faith versus natural birth. The third case, the tax collector, represents the enjoyment of those who are in the kingdom. Once we are cleansed and have received faith, we must feast with the Lord Jesus as the Bridegroom. We must enjoy Him as the most pleasant person.

THE WEDDING GARMENT AND THE NEW WINE

The Lord Jesus is not only the Bridegroom; He is also the wedding garment (v. 16). We cannot feast with Him unless we are clothed with the proper garment. He Himself is our new garment. He is also the new wine, which fills us within (v. 17). Thus, He is the new garment without and the new wine within. As the new garment covering us, Christ is our righteousness, and as the new wine that fills us up, Christ is our life. He is our Bridegroom whom we enjoy, and He is also our qualification for enjoying Him. He is the new garment, and He is the new strength, the inner energy, that we need to appreciate and enjoy Him. Christ is also the new wineskin, the proper church life, that preserves the wine. We were lepers, but we have been cleansed by the blood and life of the Lord Jesus. We have received faith and believe in Him. Now we are feasting with Him as our pleasant Bridegroom.

CHAPTER TWENTY-TWO

PRINCIPLES OF THE KINGDOM (2)

Scripture Reading: Matt. 10:16-22, 34-39; 11:11-12, 18-19, 25-27, 28-30

Beginning with Matthew 8, there are several cases that illustrate principles related to the kingdom. We have covered three cases already, and they are very meaningful. The first case shows that we were lepers, but our leprosy has been cleansed. The second case reveals that we enter the kingdom by faith. The third case tells us that now we need to enjoy our Bridegroom. The leprosy is gone, and faith has come for enjoyment. This is the kingdom life.

A leper represents man corrupted by Satan. The man God created was clean and pure. After God saw everything that He had made, including man, He said, "Very good" (Gen. 1:31). However, by the time God came in the flesh (John 1:14) to establish His kingdom, man had become a leper. Leprosy signifies the total corruption of man caused by the rebellious one, Satan.

Matthew reveals the kingdom, giving us an all-inclusive picture of the wonderful One who is the seed. He is God incarnated as a man to deal with His enemy and establish His kingdom. God's intention is to set up His kingdom with humanity, and He created man for this purpose. God created man in His own image so that man could exercise dominion over all the earth, especially over all the creeping things (Gen. 1:26-28). Satan, the serpent, is counted among the creeping things. It is God's desire that man subdue the earth, conquer the enemy, and recover God's authority in order that God could establish His kingdom.

Satan, however, corrupted the man whom God had created, making him a leper. According to the Old Testament types, no person is more defiled, more corrupted and ruined, than a leper. A leper represents the totality of Satan's work of corruption upon humanity. Keep in mind this meaning of a leper. When God came in the flesh, the man created by God had become fully corrupted and was a leper. But regardless of how much Satan had corrupted and ruined man, God can cleanse the lepers and recover them. This is exactly what the Lord did. If you read Leviticus 14, you can see how the blood and the water were used to cleanse the leper. When the Lord Jesus died on the cross,

blood and water came out of His side (John 19:34). The blood signifies redemption, and the water signifies life. With His blood and His life He has recovered us. This is an exceedingly marvelous revelation! Through His redemption our leprosy has vanished. Our ruin and corruption are gone.

The corruption is gone, and faith has come. By our natural birth, we are Gentiles and thus disqualified from participating in the kingdom. But we can have faith, which comes from realizing a wonderful object. Without an object to realize, faith is vain. Faith needs an object. The object of our faith is the wonderful Lord Jesus who has all authority and who, in Himself, is the highest authority. As we realize such a wonderful One by faith, we spontaneously enter the kingdom.

The corruption caused by the enemy has been cleared away, and the wonderful and mysterious faith has come into us. Once we have this faith, we should sit down and feast with the Lord Jesus. He is our feast. Also, He is our Bridegroom, the most pleasant person, and He is our new garment and our new wine, the qualification and the energy for enjoying Him. Christ is even our church life, the new wineskin. We simply need to enjoy Him.

We need to recall the difference between the cases selected by John and the cases selected by Matthew. In John the cases are related to life; in Matthew the cases illustrate different aspects of the kingdom. The kingdom life means that the leprosy has been cleansed and that faith has come for the enjoyment of Christ.

The Bible is very profound. No human mind could compose such a book. Its composition is very simple, but the revelation it contains is profound. The Lord Jesus even revealed the matter of resurrection from the title of God—*the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob.* This simple title of God implies the resurrection of the dead. Although the stories recorded in the Bible seem simple, the implications of the revelations contained in them are profound.

THE OPPOSITION OF HUMAN CULTURE TO THE KINGDOM

Matthew 10 reveals another principle of the kingdom. Although our leprosy has been cleansed and faith is here for our enjoyment of Christ, we must realize that human culture stands in opposition to the kingdom of God. The

primary elements of human culture are religion, politics, and the family life. Human culture is the best invention of mankind. However, we have to realize that Satan in a subtle way utilizes human culture to oppose God's kingdom. You may think that only sinful things are against the kingdom, but according to the Bible, sinful things do not oppose the kingdom of God as much as human culture. It has become the stronghold of Satan. Satan maintains a hold on human culture, utilizing it as his kingdom. Human culture has become a basic part and a great portion of the kingdom of Satan. We need a revelation of this fact.

Chapters 8 and 9 of Matthew present a wonderful picture. Regardless of how much Satan has ruined and corrupted man, the Lord Jesus has come to wipe human culture out. By His appearing, leprosy is gone and faith has come. By looking at the Lord Jesus, faith comes. When we look at Him, we have faith, and by this faith we enjoy Him. At this point, though, the Lord Jesus was wise in warning us, the kingdom people, about the opposition of human culture that is constituted with the family, religion, and politics.

In Matthew 10:16-22 the Lord said that He was sending the kingdom people forth as sheep in the midst of wolves. He went on to say that they will be delivered up to sanhedrins and scourged in the synagogues. The sanhedrins were the strongest organization of the Jewish religion at that time, and the synagogues were the places where the Jewish people met to worship God. Yet, it is in the synagogues that the kingdom people will be scourged. This reveals that the religious people will persecute the kingdom people.

The Lord also said that they will be brought before governors and kings, a clear reference to the political people. These verses tell us that both religion and politics are against the kingdom of God. Why are they opposed to God's kingdom? It is because they have their own kingdoms; religion is a kingdom for religious people, and politics is a kingdom for political people. King Herod was troubled when he heard the news of the birth of the Lord Jesus because he was afraid of losing his kingdom. The situation is the same today. The entire human culture stands in opposition to the kingdom of the heavens. Which religion was so much against the kingdom? It was not a pagan religion but the typical religion of Judaism. The people who worshipped God in the temple and in the synagogues were the persecutors of the kingdom people. If we go along with human culture and religion, we will be welcomed and not persecuted. But if we are for the Lord's kingdom, religion will oppose us. That

was the situation when the Lord Jesus and the apostles were on the earth. If we mean business with the Lord's kingdom, we will experience the same opposition today.

After the Lord spoke about religion and politics, He referred to the family (v. 21). The Lord spoke about fathers and sons, mothers and daughters, and other family relations (vv. 35-37). Not all of your relatives will be in favor of the kingdom. The situation is the same today as then. Do not think that people are nicer today than then. The cultured people may be even tougher and more severe than the uncultured people. I am not encouraging you to damage your family life, to be an enemy toward your father, or to persecute your wife. If you read the Lord's word carefully, you will see that the kingdom people should be the persecuted ones, not the persecuting ones. We should not be the enemies, and we should not be the persecutors. We have to be the persecuted ones. We should flee if we can, but if we cannot, we must suffer. According to other portions of the Bible, we must pray for the opposers and the persecutors (5:44). We must love them and pray that they will become the same as we are. Mainly, we need to realize this principle: the whole of human culture opposes the kingdom of God.

We should not be disturbed by this, because the opposition of human culture can become our "gasoline station" where we can purchase the extra portion of oil for our vessel (25:9). This means that we take the opportunity to pay the price of losing our soul-life (10:38-39). The price we must pay is our soul-life. Sometimes a husband is caught for the kingdom, but his wife remains a part of human culture. In such a case the husband must lose his soul-life. The Lord Jesus spoke clearly about these matters. He has never cheated us. He said that He did not come to bring peace, but a sword (v. 34).

The Lord Jesus really troubled Judaism, including all the priests. And He created many "troublemakers"—first twelve, then seventy—and sent out these "troublemakers" to create even more trouble. If we in the local churches mean business with the Lord about His kingdom, and if we are faithful to the kingdom, we will cause more trouble to today's Christianity, because today's Christianity has become a constituent of human culture. Since Christianity is a strong factor of contemporary culture, it becomes the strongest opposition to the kingdom of God. There can be no reconciliation between the local churches and Christianity. The more the local churches go on in the kingdom and as the kingdom, the more trouble we will cause to human culture. We all

need to realize this. This is one of the many principles of the kingdom revealed in the book of Matthew.

TAKING THE KINGDOM BY VIOLENCE

Let us now proceed to chapter 11 where we see even more principles of the kingdom. One of the principles revealed in this chapter is that we must be violent against all opposition to the kingdom of God (v. 12). We should not be so nice, or we will be unable to enter the kingdom. We must be violent for the sake of the kingdom. For example, if there is no opposition to my walking through a door, I may walk in nicely as a gentleman. However, if some enemies oppose my entry and attempt to frustrate me, I must be violent and use force in order to enter. This was what the Lord Jesus had in mind when He spoke about the time of John the Baptist's ministry, which was a transitional period. It was neither the Old Testament age nor the New Testament age. John proclaimed the kingdom, saying, "Repent, for the kingdom of the heavens has drawn near." By making this proclamation, he aroused strong opposition. When the Lord Jesus appeared, He proclaimed the same message. This preaching of the kingdom aroused opposition from the religious people. The chief opposition against the kingdom came from Judaism. It was very difficult for anyone to enter into the kingdom at that time because the Pharisees, Sadducees, and priests opposed their entry. By their opposition they became enemies of the kingdom. Although the entrance was pointed out and even opened by John the Baptist and the Lord Jesus, the Jewish people rose up in opposition. If you wanted to enter into the kingdom at that time, you had to be violent.

The same principle applies today. If you want to get into the proper church life, you need to be at least a little violent because the opposers, criticizers, and enemies are fighting to keep you out. Since they make every attempt to frustrate you, what should you do? You must be violent! Our present environment is much the same as the one that was created after John's preaching. When John came and proclaimed the kingdom, immediately the Pharisees, Sadducees, scribes, and priests rose up to oppose. According to the Lord's word, everyone who entered the kingdom during that time had to be violent. Do you think today's situation is different? It is the same. Since the local church has been proclaimed in this country, the opposition has been stirred up. I am not trying to be wild, and I am not teaching you to be tough

and rough. I do not want you to be rough, but I do expect that you will be violent for the kingdom of God.

NO OUTWARD REGULATIONS

Let us go on to see another principle of the kingdom related to John the Baptist. In speaking about John the Baptist, the Lord Jesus established this principle: in the kingdom, unlike in religion, there are no regulations. In Judaism there are many regulations about eating and drinking. When John the Baptist came not eating and drinking in a normal way, people said that he had a demon. When the Lord Jesus came both eating and drinking, they called Him a gluttonous man and a drunkard (v. 19). They said that John the Baptist was demon-possessed for not eating and drinking, and they said that the Lord Jesus was gluttonous because He did eat and drink. You may ask, Which is right—to eat or not to eat? to drink or not to drink? Judaism has many regulations about these matters, but in the kingdom there are no such regulations. This does not mean, however, that there is looseness. Rather, in the kingdom there are the children of wisdom. Wisdom is justified by her children (v. 19, see also footnote 4 in the Recovery Version). All the kingdom people are children of wisdom. What is wisdom, and who is wisdom? Christ is wisdom, and we are His children. Therefore, it is no longer a matter of outward regulation but of inward life. We are not regulated outwardly; we are controlled and directed inwardly by the life of Christ. The kingdom has no outward regulations, for the kingdom people are the children of wisdom, the children of God, who have the life of Christ.

THE KINGDOM REVEALED TO BABES

Matthew 11:25-27 reveals another basic principle: the kingdom is absolutely a matter of divine revelation. After speaking about John the Baptist, the Lord turned to talk to the Father. Verse 25 begins, “At that time Jesus answered and said...” This is quite interesting. Has your prayer ever been an answer to God? Have you ever begun your prayer by answering God? In verse 25 Christ started His prayer by answering God: “I extol You, Father, Lord of heaven and of earth, because You have hidden these things from the wise and intelligent.” This is marvelous! The Lord’s prayer in these verses began as an answer to the Father. It seems that as the Lord Jesus was talking to the people, the heavenly Father asked Him a question: “Do you mean that God the Father hides the kingdom from the wise and intelligent?” The Lord responded, “Yes, Father,

that is what I mean." The principle here is that we should never exercise our wisdom or cleverness. In the kingdom life we must forget our wisdom and cleverness. The kingdom of the heavens is not a matter of our being wise or intelligent. If we think that we are wise or intelligent, we are finished as far as the kingdom is concerned. We must be like infants. If we become like infants, we will receive the revelation. God hides the kingdom from the wise and intelligent, but He reveals it to infants. Therefore, do not exercise your wisdom, mentality, or cleverness. As long as you place confidence in your knowledge, you are through with the kingdom. We all should be infants in the local churches today. If we become wise and intelligent, we can no longer participate in the kingdom life or share the enjoyment of Christ. The kingdom life will become a hidden matter as far as we are concerned. We must be like infants. Then we will receive the revelation.

What is this revelation? The revelation is that the kingdom is nothing other than the Son of God (v. 27). This verse tells us that the revelation of the kingdom is simply the revelation of Jesus Christ, the Son of God. If you are religiously wise and intelligent, you will never receive the revelation of the kingdom. The kingdom is a heavenly revelation concerning the Lord Jesus. If you receive this revelation, you will know Him in such a rich way, in a way of tasting and in a way of life. In the church life we should continually have a vision of the Lord Jesus, not merely a doctrine about Him. The content of the kingdom is the wonderful Lord Jesus. Verse 27 gives us the revelation of the kingdom life. If we read this verse in its context beginning at verse 20, we will see that it is the revelation of the kingdom life. The revelation of the kingdom life is the revelation of the Son with the Father.

Many years ago I studied the Bible under the influence of some good teachers. However, the more I was taught, the less I knew the Lord Jesus. One day the Lord brought me to the local church. In a very short time I came to know the Lord Jesus, not in a doctrinal way but in a living way, in the way of life, taste, and enjoyment. Although I have been in this way for more than forty years, I cannot exhaust the enjoyment of the Christ revealed to me in the local churches. Nevertheless, I am still concerned that some of the dear ones may remain wise and intelligent in a religious way. If so, they will have no real knowledge of Christ and no genuine enjoyment of Him. We need to follow the principle that the revelation of the kingdom is given to infants.

Let us review the principles we have covered thus far in Matthew 11. First, due to the opposition of human culture, the kingdom must be taken by violence. Second, the kingdom is not a matter of outward regulations. Since the kingdom life is the life of Christ, we should not make any outward regulations into a standard. Third, if we remain in the kingdom for the kingdom life, we must forget our wisdom and cleverness. It is awful to be religiously wise and intelligent. We need to become like infants, so simple and so single. Then we will know the Lord Jesus whom others cannot know. We will also know the Father. The Son with the Father will become our enjoyment.

A LIFE OF REST

Another principle of the kingdom is in Matthew 11:28-30. Once we forsake our wisdom and intelligence, we will know the Lord Jesus and have a real enjoyment of Him. After this we will have rest. The kingdom life is not only a life of enjoyment; it is also a life of rest. If you will apply the first three principles revealed in Matthew 11, all your burdens will be lifted. If you try to be wise and intelligent, you will be heavily burdened. You need to be unloaded. Who are the ones that are the most heavily burdened? It is the wise and intelligent ones, the religious ones, and the cultured ones. The kingdom people, on the contrary, are the unloaded ones. Brothers and sisters, are you loaded or unloaded? If you will be simple and single instead of religiously wise and intelligent, you will be unloaded, and you will have rest. The yoke you bear will be very light. This is the kingdom life. The kingdom life is a life of feasting, a life of enjoyment, and a life of rest.

Whenever you lose your rest, it is an indication that you are not experiencing the kingdom life. Whenever you are not in the kingdom life, you will certainly be heavily burdened. Your yoke will be the yoke of slavery. However, when you exercise the principle of forsaking your religious wisdom and intelligence and of being simple, you will be immediately unburdened. You will be released and emancipated and completely at rest.

Sometimes people come to me and say, “Brother Lee, you have many burdens. How can you bear them?” I answer, “Brothers, I have no burdens. I only know how to do a little work. After working, I go home and rest.” This is the kingdom life—some work but no burden. There is a yoke, but the yoke is not heavy. Actually, the yoke is also a kind of rest because without it we might

depart from the Lord's way. If we would attempt to depart from the Lord's way, we would find that the yoke is there. This is the kingdom life.

Please bring all these matters and principles to the Lord and pray over all the verses. The Lord Himself will reveal something more. You will know the kingdom life.

Matthew is a book of the kingdom. Our leprosy is gone, and faith is here. We are enjoying, and we are resting. Let the religious people persecute, and let the enemies oppose. We should be violent to enter the kingdom by force. We have no outward regulations, and we have no burdens because we do not exercise our religious wisdom and intelligence. We are simple. We do not care what other people say about us. We only care for the rest in Christ. When we are heavily burdened, Satan is happy; but when we are resting, he trembles. This is the kingdom life.

CHAPTER TWENTY-THREE

PRINCIPLES OF THE KINGDOM (3)

Scripture Reading: Matt. 12:1-8, 15-21, 28, 38-42; 16:1, 4

Chapter 12 of Matthew reveals some further principles concerning the kingdom. Have you ever noticed the first few words of chapter 12? It begins with the words *At that time*. The same phrase is used in 11:25, which begins by saying, "At that time Jesus answered..." What is the time referred to in Matthew 12:1? The phrase *At that time* means the time when the Lord Jesus revealed the way to enter the rest. In the original manuscripts of the Bible, there were no chapters, verses, paragraphs, or punctuation. Thus, chapters 11 and 12 were not divided. "At that time" the Lord Jesus answered and prayed to the Father, and "at that time" He brought His disciples into the grainfields. The words *At that time* may be small words, but they indicate something very important. At that time the Lord Jesus revealed to His disciples the way to find rest and to enjoy Him as rest in the kingdom. In chapter 9 we have the way to enjoy the Lord as our feast; in chapters 11 and 12 we have the way to enjoy Him as our rest.

Some may consider that the matter of enjoying the Lord should be found in John, the book of life, and not in Matthew, the book of the kingdom. But the kingdom is also a matter of enjoyment, and this enjoyment is just the Lord Jesus Himself. Do not think that the Lord Jesus as the kingdom is only a matter of authority and kingship. No—the Lord Jesus as the kingdom is also a matter of enjoyment. If you have not experienced Him as your enjoyment, you cannot be in the kingdom to the fullest extent. We will have the full enjoyment of the Lord Jesus by realizing that we have Him as the kingdom life. The more we realize Him as our kingdom life, the more we will enjoy Him as the feast. If we have little enjoyment of Christ, we will have little experience of the kingdom.

In the same way, if we have no rest, neither will we have much experience of the kingdom. Suppose there were no government, rule, or law in the United States. Do you think it would be possible to rest in this country? There would be no rest; instead, there would be constant turmoil. Likewise, true rest comes out of experiencing the Lord Jesus as our kingdom life. When we honor,

realize, and partake of Him as our kingdom life, we enjoy Him as rest. He is not only our feast but also our rest. Both the feast and the rest are found in the kingdom. Although we may think that the feast and rest are only related to life, they are also found in the kingdom.

ENJOYMENT IN THE CHURCH LIFE

Many of us can testify that we have found such enjoyment in the church life. We have enjoyed so many feasts. Also, when we came into the church life, we realized that we had come home. What is home? It is the place of rest. Many Christians who were seeking the Lord very much were simply wandering aimlessly before they came into the church life. However, once they came into the church life, they had the feeling that they were home. I can never forget that during the years of 1969 and 1970, the testimonies in nearly every meeting were about this matter of finding a home in the church life. In those years one of the favorite songs had these words: "We are home! We are home! We are home!" In the local church we have the feast and we have the rest because the local church is the reality of the kingdom. The Lord is here not only as life but also as the kingdom life.

THE GREATER TEMPLE, THE PRESENT DAVID, AND THE LORD OF THE SABBATH

Let us consider the case in Matthew 12:1-8. While the religious people were keeping the Sabbath in the temple, synagogues, or homes, the Lord Jesus brought His disciples to the wheat field to gather wheat. The Pharisees saw them picking and eating the grains. How did it happen that the Pharisees were there? They were the "Sabbath patrol," out on patrol, trying to find the Lord Jesus and His disciples breaking the Sabbath law. Eventually, they caught the Lord and His disciples. (For more details, read *Christ versus Religion*.) Those poor religious Pharisees would prefer to keep people hungry in order to observe the Sabbath. The real meaning of the Sabbath is rest. To keep the Sabbath is to have rest. Even if you are suffering from hunger, the religious people would force you to observe the Sabbath regulations. If you were hungry, and the religious people compelled you to keep the Sabbath laws, would that be a rest or a suffering? No doubt it would be a suffering. But the religious ones do not care about the suffering; they only care for the Sabbath regulations. To keep these regulations is to make yourself heavily burdened. Now we can understand the word of the Lord Jesus in Matthew 11:28: "Come

to Me all who toil and are burdened, and I will give you rest." Not only were the disciples hungry on that Sabbath day, but the men on the Sabbath patrol were also hungry. But they dared not to eat. They kept the Sabbath, yet they were suffering. This means that they were heavily burdened.

The Lord Jesus wants the heavily burdened ones to come to Him so that He can give them rest. How will He give them rest? By breaking the Sabbath! He will give them rest by breaking the laws that cause them to be heavily burdened. This is the way to find rest. Many Christians quote Matthew 11:28-30 without connecting it to the previous verses or to the following verses. When they preach the gospel, they use these verses, telling the hearers that they are heavily burdened with sins. Strictly speaking, however, to be heavily burdened in this verse is not to be heavily burdened with sins but with religion, regulations, rules, rituals, and laws. You need to be unloaded. You need to be emancipated and released. To be released is to be in the kingdom of God. The kingdom is not enslavement; it is emancipation. The kingdom of Satan is slavery; the kingdom of the heavens is emancipation. When you enter into the kingdom of the heavens, you will be completely unloaded. You will be fully released, liberated, and emancipated. You will enjoy the person of Christ. No longer will you be enslaved to regulations. In the kingdom we have the living Lord Jesus without any regulations. Truly this is our emancipation. As kingdom people, how many regulations do we have? We must be able to say, "We have no regulations, but we do have the living Christ." What a release this is to us!

Suppose the brothers living in a brothers' house compiled a list of twenty-four regulations and posted it on the wall. If a young brother came to live in that house, he would feel a heavy burden to keep all the regulations. He would have to memorize them and recite them and attempt to keep them. I do not expect to see any such list in the brothers' house. I do not like to see regulations. I like to see a living person, Christ. In the brothers' house there should be only one living person—no regulations.

When the Lord Jesus was dealing with religious people, He was very wise. The Pharisees considered themselves to be very scriptural; they thought that they did everything according to the Bible. They kept the Sabbath according to the Bible. But the Lord showed them that they really did not know the Bible at all. They knew the Bible in black and white letters, but they did not know it in the Spirit. They did not know the Bible in Christ. The Lord Jesus rebuked

them by asking them whether they had read what David did. He reminded them about the time David and his followers went into the temple and ate the bread of the Presence, which was not lawful for them to eat (1 Sam. 21:1-6; Lev. 24:9). He also asked whether they had read of the priests who were allowed to profane the Sabbath in the temple and be guiltless (Num. 28:9-10). As He spoke with them, the Lord Jesus revealed that He Himself is the greater temple and the present David (Matt. 12:3-7). Many religious ones only care for knowing the Bible, but God's intention is for us to know Christ. We should not simply know the Bible in letters; we must know Christ in the Spirit. We must know Christ in a living way and know Him as everything to us. To know the Bible apart from Christ means nothing.

The Lord Jesus revealed to the Pharisees, to His disciples, and even to us today that the primary matter is not to know the Bible but to know the living Lord Jesus. Whatever is found in the Bible must be Christ. If there is a temple in the Bible, that temple must be Christ. If there is a King David in the Bible, he must be Christ. Even love in the Bible must be Christ. The Bible tells us to honor our parents, but that honor must be Christ Himself. Simply to know the Bible for the sake of knowing the Bible means nothing. We must know the Bible by Christ. We need to realize that every positive item found in the Bible must be Christ. Eventually, the Lord Jesus told the Pharisees that He was even Lord of the Sabbath (v. 8). This is something more than His being the greater temple and present David. The Lord is the Lord! What the Lord means is this: even if there is no verse to justify what He is doing, He still has the right to do it because He is the Lord. He had the right to establish rules for observing the Sabbath, and He has the right to abolish those rules. He had the right to tell people to keep the Sabbath, and He has the right to tell people to break the Sabbath. He has the right because He is the Lord of the Sabbath.

It is quite difficult for the so-called scriptural people to break through the regulations. They are in bondage to what they think is the letter of the Bible. When we pray-read the words of the Bible, they ask if we have biblical ground for this. When we shout loudly as we are praising the Lord, they ask if we have a verse to justify this practice. They have been heavily burdened with regulations and Bible knowledge. They need to be released. They need to see that in the kingdom it is not a matter of knowing the Bible; it is a matter of knowing the living Lord Jesus.

THE HIDDEN CHARACTER OF THE KINGDOM

Following this, Matthew quoted a portion from Isaiah telling us who the Lord Jesus was at that time (Matt. 12:18-21). The Lord Jesus was a person with the Spirit of God. He did not strive or cry or shout or make Himself known to people on the streets. He had no fame, and He made no name for Himself. In a sense He was very hidden. This is one of the most important aspects of the kingdom life. If we try to become great, if we try to make a name for ourselves, we will become the great tree instead of the little mustard herb (13:31-32). When the Lord Jesus was living on earth, He never made Himself great. Rather He always kept Himself small. He did not strive; neither did anyone hear His voice on the street. We are even told that He would not break a bruised reed or quench the smoking flax. Reeds were used by Jewish children to make pipes as musical instruments. When a pipe was bruised and did not produce the proper sound, they would break it and throw it away. Many times we are like bruised reeds and cannot produce proper music. As a rule, we should be broken and cast away. However, the Lord Jesus will never do this. Also, in ancient times the Jewish people used flax with oil as a torch, especially for walking at night. When the flax torches ran out of oil, they quit shining and became only smoking flax, which people would quench and throw away. Nearly all of us are like bruised reeds and smoking flax. The Lord Jesus, however, would never cast us away because He Himself is such a little one. This was His character when He was on earth.

All these verses reveal an important principle of the kingdom: the kingdom today is not something great in appearance. In form, the kingdom life is small and lowly. No local church should display a grand appearance. Even if we have a large number, we should never flaunt it. We should not have any outward form. The smaller our appearance, the better. We must be little; even we must be nothing. We should be hidden and concealed all the time. If we put all these passages together, we will discover that the way to have rest in the kingdom life is not to be great or manifest or public. The way to enjoy Christ as our rest in the kingdom life is to remain small, concealed, and hidden. We should never become a great tree; we must be the little mustard herb.

THE SIGN OF JONAH

Another principle is also revealed in Matthew 12. The religious people came to the Lord Jesus asking for a sign, a miracle. They wanted Him to perform a miracle to prove that He was of God. He answered them in this way: "An evil and adulterous generation seeks after a sign, and a sign shall not be given to it except the sign of Jonah the prophet" (v. 39). Jonah was a prophet who spent three days and three nights buried within a great fish in the waters of death. After three days he came out. This was a type of the crucifixion and resurrection of the Lord Jesus. The Lord Jesus indicated to the religious people that their generation would see no sign except the unique sign of the crucified and resurrected Christ.

The atmosphere among some religious people in our own time is the same. They always want to see signs, miracles, and healings. However, in the kingdom life we should not display ourselves with signs and wonders. Rather, we should reveal ourselves as being crucified and resurrected. The sign that is needed today is not a wonder or a miracle; it is the sign of a crucified and resurrected person.

We need to put all these principles together. At the end of chapter 11, the Lord Jesus began to show us the way to enjoy Him as rest in the kingdom life. In chapter 12 He revealed that we need to break the religious regulations but refuse to make ourselves great, public, and popular. We should not seek for popularity. We need to be hidden, small, and low. Furthermore, we should not make an ostentatious show by doing miracles and signs. On the contrary, the more people require signs of us, the more we should go to the cross, the more we should be buried in the death water. The more people expect us to do something extraordinary, the more we must go to the cross to be crucified and to the death water to be buried. Following crucifixion and burial, we will experience resurrection. The kingdom people have to be the crucified, buried, and resurrected people.

If we are today's Jonah, experiencing death and resurrection, we will certainly be today's Solomon, building the temple. Once again we see that Matthew does not follow the historical sequence. According to the sequence of history, Solomon came first and Jonah came later. Why then is Jonah mentioned first in Matthew? It is because Jonah typifies Christ as the crucified and resurrected One, and Solomon typifies Christ as the reigning One. After being resurrected, Christ is the King who reigns over the earth. Therefore, in history Solomon precedes Jonah, but in typology Jonah

precedes Solomon. Matthew did not write according to history; he wrote according to revelation. He selected facts and incidents and put them together to show us a revelation. The Lord Jesus is the unique sign. He is first the crucified, buried, and resurrected One. Then He is the reigning Christ. This is the sign for today. The crucified, buried, and resurrected Christ is now reigning. Because He is reigning, the kingdom is here. He is the greater Jonah, and He is also the greater Solomon. For the kingdom life, this generation needs no other sign. We do not need miracles. We only need the unique sign—the crucified life, the buried life, and the resurrected life that has become the reigning life.

CHAPTER TWENTY-FOUR

FROM REJECTION TO GLORY (1)

Scripture Reading: Matt. 13:53-57; 14:1, 10, 12-13, 15-21, 23-32; 15:32-38; 17:1-8

As we have pointed out previously, Matthew is a book that reveals the kingdom. Chapters 1 through 7 may be considered as the first section of the book, with chapters 5 through 7 being a definition or description of the kingdom. Beginning with chapter 8 and continuing through chapter 12, Matthew presents many cases that illustrate the genuine kingdom life. The kingdom people were once lepers, but they have been cleansed. Now they are people of faith in Christ who enjoy Christ as everything—as the feast, the Bridegroom, the new garment, the new wineskin, the new wine, the rest, the present David, the greater Jonah, and the greater Solomon. By these illustrations we can realize that the Lord Jesus is everything to the kingdom people. He is also the sign. The kingdom people always bear the sign of the crucified, buried, resurrected, and reigning Christ.

The Bible is composed somewhat like a jigsaw puzzle. The pieces of the picture are found in various places, and we need to find them and put them together. When we read Matthew 8—12, we must have an overall view. If we simply read it paragraph by paragraph, we will receive little revelation. At best, we will read some stories. The case of the cleansing of the leper will simply be a story. In order to understand these five chapters, we need revelation and enlightenment. If we see the vision and have an overall view, we will realize that these five chapters are a section showing us the real kingdom life.

The real kingdom life begins with a leper. Then it bears the sign of the crucified, buried, resurrected, and reigning Christ. Christ is our feast, our Bridegroom, our new garment, our new wineskin, our new wine, and our rest. He is our David, our temple, our Jonah, our Solomon, and our sign. Christ is everything to us! The way we enjoy Him is not by our natural birth but by living faith and by breaking the religious regulations. In order to enjoy Christ, we must be fully emancipated from all religious burdens.

Chapter 13 through the first part of chapter 17 comprises another section of the book of Matthew. We will be unable to understand the incidents recorded in these chapters if we do not consider them as a group. What does this section show us?

Forty years ago, after I had given up my job and had come into the Lord's ministry full time, I intended to go to Shanghai to stay with Brother Watchman Nee and to learn of him. During that period of time, the Lord showed me something from this section of Matthew. I had been in Shanghai only a short time when word came from Brother Nee on a Lord's Day morning that I should give the message that day. It was Brother Nee's way never to give much warning. Word came to me just before the morning meeting. I thought to myself, "I have just arrived in Shanghai, and Shanghai is the biggest church." I was scared. Then the burden came to me about what I had seen in this section of Matthew. What I saw was very real to me. It is still real today, and this word is nearly the same as I delivered in Shanghai in 1933.

REJECTION BY RELIGION

At the end of chapter 12 there is an incident involving the mother and brothers of the Lord. When He learned that they wanted to speak with Him, He asked, "Who is My mother, and who are My brothers?" (v. 48). The Lord went on to say that it is not a matter of natural birth but of doing the will of God. Those who do the will of God are the Lord's mother, brothers, and sisters. The will of God mentioned here is not something small; it actually means the kingdom. "Seek first His kingdom...and all these things will be added to you" (6:33). "Your kingdom come; Your will be done, as in heaven, so also on earth" (v. 10). What is this will? In Matthew 7:21-23 the Lord Jesus referred to this will. He said that the day will come when some will say that they have done miracles in His name, cast out demons in His name, and prophesied in His name. At that time the Lord will admit that they have done all those things, but He will tell them that He never allowed them to do those things and that they are workers of lawlessness (v. 23). These people will have no participation in the kingdom of the heavens. Those who will share in the kingdom of the heavens will be those who do the will of the Father. According to the book of Matthew, His will is to have the kingdom.

The Lord Jesus told people that those who do the will of God, who seek the kingdom of God—not those according to natural birth—are His brothers and

sisters. The Lord made it very clear to His disciples that His relationships with people have nothing to do with natural birth. This even included His natural mother. Do not listen to the superstition of Catholicism which says that Mary was the "holy mother." According to Matthew 12, the Lord Jesus repudiated everything that was according to natural birth, even His own mother.

Following this, in chapter 13, the Lord gave all the parables, the mysteries of the kingdom. Not one person is qualified by nature and intellectual capacity to understand these parables. The Lord Jesus made the kingdom a mystery, a hidden matter, just like a treasure hidden in a field. When the Lord Jesus found the kingdom, He immediately hid it. Where and when did He hide the kingdom? It was in Matthew 13. After repudiating all natural relationships, He began to hide the kingdom from the natural people. At the end of chapter 13 He was completely rejected by the natural, religious people. After speaking the seven parables, He returned to His own country and entered the synagogue, the place where religious people discussed the things of God. Although the Lord Jesus renounced everything natural, the people in His own country recognized Him in a natural way. They said, "Is not this the carpenter's son? Is not His mother called Mary, and His brothers James and Joseph and Simon and Judas? And His sisters, are they not all here with us?" (vv. 55-56). The religious people knew Him in a natural way. In 2 Corinthians 5:16 Paul said that he did not know Christ according to the flesh, that is, according to anything natural. We should not know Him according to the flesh but according to the Spirit. The Pharisees and Judaizers knew Him according to the natural appearance. They knew His carpenter father, His mother, His brothers, and His sisters, but they did not know Him according to the Spirit. Rather, they rejected Him. The Lord had repudiated everything of natural birth and had made the kingdom a hidden mystery. So the religious people totally rejected Him.

PERSECUTION BY POLITICS

In chapter 14 we are told that Herod the king killed John the Baptist. When the report of this was brought to the Lord, He simply retreated into the wilderness. Remember that this is a book of the revelation of the kingdom. Since the Lord Jesus repudiated everything natural and made the kingdom a mystery, the religious people rejected Him and the kingdom, and the political people persecuted and killed those who accepted the kingdom. Hence, He

went into the wilderness. If you had lived at that time and had wanted to follow Him, you would have had to go to the wilderness.

What does this mean? Chapter 13 through the first part of chapter 17 is a section showing us the period of time from the rejection of the Lord Jesus and His kingdom until the full coming of the kingdom. During this period between His rejection and the full manifestation of the kingdom, the kingdom people must follow Him by leaving religion and politics and going into the wilderness. We are still living in this period today, for it began at the time of Matthew 13 and will continue until the full manifestation of the kingdom. At the full coming of the kingdom, there will be the real and full transfiguration of all the kingdom people.

The transfiguration of the Lord Jesus on the mountaintop in Matthew 17 was a miniature of the full coming of the kingdom. It was the coming of the kingdom on a small scale. The full coming of the kingdom will occur in the future. The section of Matthew that we are presently considering goes from chapter 13 until the full coming of the kingdom in the future. During this period the kingdom people must follow the Lord Jesus by going into the wilderness. The background for this move into the wilderness was His rejection by religion and His persecution by politics. If we mean business with the Lord for the kingdom, we will certainly be rejected by religion and persecuted by politics. Do not expect anything more. There can be no friendship from religion and no kindness from politics. To be the kingdom people means that we will undergo opposition from religion and persecution from politics. As we have seen, the synagogues rejected Christ, and King Herod killed John the Baptist, the forerunner of Christ. When the Lord Jesus heard of this, He did not fight or say anything. He and His disciples retreated into the wilderness. What does this mean? It means that the kingdom people are a people out of this world, out of religion, and out of politics. In a sense, until the kingdom comes in full, we are in the wilderness. In reality, we are the kingdom people and we are in the kingdom, but outwardly speaking, we are living in the wilderness.

A LIFE IN THE WILDERNESS

How can we make a living in the wilderness? The answer to this question is found in the case of Jesus' feeding five thousand people with five loaves and two fish (14:19-21). John uses the same case to indicate that Christ is the

bread of life (John 6). Matthew, however, uses this case in a different way, showing how the Lord can afford us a living in the wilderness. If you simply follow Him, He can provide you a living. As we preached the gospel in the Far East, sometimes the unbelievers would ask us, "Can Jesus take care of my eating? Will Jesus always afford something for my living?" Many times the unbelievers asked us these questions, and we dared not answer them. But I can tell you, the kingdom people, that the Lord Jesus truly provides us a living.

In Matthew 6:33 the Lord Jesus said that if we seek the kingdom first, everything we need will be added to us. While all the religious and political people are busy earning a living, the kingdom people follow the Lord Jesus in the wilderness. Even the disciples had a natural thought concerning their living. They recognized the need of the people and advised the Lord Jesus to disperse them into the villages to purchase something to eat. Actually, eating here refers to the entire realm of making a living. The Lord Jesus answered, "They do not need to go away. You give them something to eat" (14:16). We are all familiar with what happened. With only five loaves and two fish the Lord Jesus fed the entire multitude. This case shows us a principle: the kingdom people who are following the Lord Jesus must realize that their living is not based upon their doing or working but upon His caring. The Lord Jesus cares for their living.

As you read this, you may be asking, "Should we all give up our jobs and simply follow the Lord?" If you could do this, it would be wonderful. But as we discover later in the Epistles, we should still keep our jobs. However, we should not put our trust in our jobs for our living. We should never allow our jobs to frustrate us from following the Lord. Following Him and seeking the kingdom must be first, and all we need will be added to us. Eventually, the thousands of people who followed the Lord Jesus into the wilderness had something to eat. This is living by faith. The kingdom people live by faith, and they live in the wilderness. Today the Lord and His kingdom are still rejected by religion and politics. Therefore, we must follow the Lord Jesus by going to Him in the wilderness. Following Him must be our consuming desire. Do not be anxious about your education, profession, or job. Do not worry about your living. If you follow Him, He will care for your living.

A WAY ON THE STORMY SEA

After feeding the multitude, the Lord Jesus went to a high mountain to pray, and He sent His disciples to the sea (vv. 22-23). This is a picture showing us that the Lord Jesus has ascended into the heavens and that He has put all of us on the sea. The life of the kingdom people today is a life in the wilderness, and the way of the kingdom people is a way on the stormy sea. Our way on the sea is beset by tossing waves and contrary winds. As we follow the Lord Jesus, many times we will not have a comfortable feeling, and we will experience the contrary winds.

Although our life is in the wilderness and our way is on the sea, we should not worry. In the wilderness the Lord provides food to eat. Our way, being on the stormy sea, is quite risky. We must remember, however, that the Lord is on the mountaintop in the heavens praying for us (v. 23). Also, He comes to us walking on the sea, with all the waves under His feet. Although we may be frightened by the tossing waves, they are under His feet (v. 25). He walks over all the waves. Since He treads over the waves, why should we be afraid of them? The Lord Jesus rebuked Peter because he had little faith. As the kingdom people, our life is in the wilderness, and our way is on the sea. For both our living and our way, we need living faith.

Among many Christians and Christian organizations, the primary concern is how to raise money. I praise the Lord that from the first day I came into the church life, there has been no need to discuss the raising of funds. Let me tell you a story that Brother Watchman Nee related to me. The first local church in China was raised up in Foochow in 1922. The brothers met outside of Christianity and outside of denominations. Nearly all of them were students, many still in high school. Brother Nee was about nineteen years of age and was helping take the lead. They began to meet in a small home and eventually had the need to rent a larger place to contain the new converts. Few among those Chinese students had much money; most were quite poor. In one of the meetings the leading brother stood up and said, “Brothers and sisters, here is a Chinese long gown for winter use, which has been offered by a brother. If this can be sold, the price will go toward the payment of the rent for the new meeting place.” He did not say who offered the long gown but simply brought it to the meeting and announced that it was available to anyone who needed it. Two sisters were sitting there. One received the burden to buy it as soon as the announcement was made. On the other side of the room she saw a brother who was quite uncomfortable due to the winter cold. There was, of course, no heat in the room. The sister saw the brother in need and had the burden to

help him. When the responsible brother announced the price of eight dollars, she spoke with the sister sitting next to her asking, “Why don’t we buy this long gown for that brother?” The sister immediately responded, “I had the same feeling, but I have just four dollars.” Both sisters had the same feeling and the same amount of money. Right away they stood up, went to the front, and bought the long gown for eight dollars. Then they asked that it be given to the brother who was uncomfortable from the cold. Who do you think that brother was? He was the brother who had originally offered the gown! Thus, both the need for the hall and the need of the brother were cared for by the Lord. We have seen the faithfulness of the Lord in many such experiences.

To illustrate further, when I came to this country, I had very little money. I was not sent here and supported regularly by a mission. As some of the brothers from Taipei could testify, I came to this country without the promise of any support. You may ask, “How then was the work started?” It simply started. The work started in this country in 1963, and we were burdened to publish the little magazine called *The Stream*. Although we had almost no funds, the brothers transcribed the messages, polished them, and were prepared to put them into print. As the time came to print them, we looked at one another. There was no need to discuss money; we all realized we did not have enough. By the Lord’s mercy I had two hundred dollars, and I contributed that toward the cost of printing. Eventually, the account contained four hundred dollars. That was the beginning of the publication of *The Stream*.

We need to believe in the Lord Jesus. If our living is in the wilderness, He will take care of us. If our way is on the sea, He is on the mountain praying for us and treading upon all the waves. The waves are under His feet. Eventually, the little boat with the disciples in it came safely to shore. Both the disciples who remained in the boat and Brother Peter who jumped out of the boat were kept safe.

The little boat signifies your little job. Your teaching job or your profession is a little boat. Whether you stay in the boat or come out of the boat, you must still trust in the Lord’s call. I do not encourage you to leave the boat; that may frighten you. However, if you hear the word of the Lord saying, “Come,” then you may leap out of the boat. Do not put all your trust in the boat. Some people believe in the Lord Jesus but also rely on the boat. Although the Lord is treading over the waves, they still need a little boat to carry them. Peter saw

that it was the Lord, and he leaped out of the boat and went to Him. However, whether you keep the job or jump out of the job, it eventually will make no difference. The Lord will take care of you.

This portion of Matthew reveals the way to follow the Lord Jesus during the period from His rejection until the full coming of the kingdom. The way to follow Him is the way of faith. Faith is not something of our thinking or reasoning. Faith is simply the realization of what Christ is. No matter how much religion has rejected Him and politics has persecuted Him, He is still the Lord of all! The rejected Jesus, the persecuted Jesus, is able to feed five thousand men with five loaves and two fish. In Matthew 15 the Lord fed another great multitude in the wilderness, once again showing that He could provide them a living.

In 1933 the Lord Jesus called me to give up my job. Why do I say that the boat in chapter 14 of Matthew represents our job? Because this corresponds to my experience. The year that I gave up my job, I felt just like Peter leaving the boat. To my sensation, the job I had was a little boat. In my little boat, I was quite safe. If I should jump out of this boat, giving up my job, what would become of my living? What would I rely upon? But the Lord Jesus called me to forsake that little boat, and I have been walking safely over the sea for many years. On the other hand, many dear ones have kept their jobs and professions. Eventually, there is no difference. The Lord takes care of both.

We must realize that today is still the period between the rejection of the Lord Jesus and the full coming of the kingdom. As we are following Him during this period, our living is in the wilderness, and our way is on the sea. For both of these we need faith. Faith is not vain; faith is a reality. The Lord Jesus, the real One, is the object of our faith. We are in the wilderness, but the Lord Jesus is here. We are on the stormy sea, and the winds are contrary to us, but He is here. He is treading upon the waves, and they are all beneath His feet. So we have peace. We have peace by faith in the Lord Jesus, the One whom we realize as the object of our faith. This is the way to follow the Lord Jesus during this period. The period of His rejection began nineteen hundred years ago, and it continues today. We are still under the rejection of religion and the persecution of politics. We are in the wilderness, and we are on the sea following the Lord Jesus by faith. He provides our living, and He takes care of our safety. What we need is living faith to go on with the Lord for the sake of His kingdom until the kingdom comes in full.

CHAPTER TWENTY-FIVE

FROM REJECTION TO GLORY (2)

Scripture Reading: Matt. 15:1-11, 17-28

In this chapter we will continue the matter of following the Lord Jesus during the period from His rejection in Matthew 13 until the full coming of the kingdom in the future. As we have pointed out, the book of Matthew was not written according to historical sequence, but according to revelation. Matthew selected certain instances of the Lord's walk on earth and compiled them to present a particular revelation. From chapter 13 to the first part of chapter 17, Matthew put several incidents together in order to show us the proper way to follow the Lord Jesus during the time of His rejection and before the manifestation of the kingdom. As we have seen in the last chapter, we must follow Him into the wilderness, where we need to have faith in Him for our living. We live by faith in Him. Also, for our way on the stormy sea, we need to trust Him. In spite of many storms and contrary winds, we may simply have peace in Christ. We have no fear of the winds and the waves because our life is in His hands. Thus, we are at peace.

All the kingdom people must realize that the Lord Jesus is very practical. He knows when we are hungry and when we are in need. He also knows when we are facing a storm. On the one hand, He is praying for us on the mountain, and on the other hand, He comes to be with us on the sea. He is the very Jehovah-plus and God-plus. "Behold, I am with you all the days until the consummation of the age" (28:20). We need living faith in the practical Lord Jesus. Never forget that genuine faith is simply to realize what the Lord Jesus is. He is real and He is practical. If we truly believe that He is practical, we will be at peace whenever we have a need. He gave us a promise in Matthew 6:33: "Seek first His kingdom and His righteousness, and all these things will be added to you." The Lord gives us the kingdom plus something additional—the needs for our daily living. While we are seeking His kingdom, our daily needs will be supplied as something additional. Our way is always secure. However, it may not be secure according to outward situations or circumstances. Outwardly speaking, we may be in danger. We may be in a storm or on a raging sea, but actually we are very safe. The Lord Jesus is safer than a little boat, and He is even more secure than a peaceful sea. All the

storms are under His feet. As we look back on the past years, we can surely testify that He is faithful.

THE KINGDOM AS A REALITY

Now we come to the third point of following the Lord Jesus during the time of His rejection. While we are following Him in the kingdom life, we have to realize the kingdom as a reality. The kingdom does not have an outward, formal appearance. Religion, on the contrary, has altogether a false appearance. Religion cares for the outward appearance. If you visit the so-called Christian churches at the eleven o'clock service on Sunday morning, you will find that everything appears nice outwardly. Everyone is neat and clean, kind and good. But that is a formal, outward falsehood. Do you think that the people attending the service are really that clean, kind, humble, and nice? Look at the choirs and at every aspect of the service—do they have reality? In the words of Matthew 15:2, they wash their hands outwardly, but their heart is defiled. They may cleanse their hands, but their heart is corrupt and dirty. The so-called church services are outwardly very quiet, and they would condemn us for shouting and praising in our meetings. Outwardly, religiously, and formally, the people are quiet and everything is in order, but inwardly, they are full of confusion and corruption.

Here is the main point: in the kingdom we must not be concerned about the outward washing of hands. If the outward situation is a mess, do not try to change it. Leave it the way it is. If you have long hair, do not cut it short just to appear nice outwardly. You may have short hair and appear outwardly to be a very nice person, but inwardly you may be corrupt. Do not be concerned with the outward appearance; the reality of the kingdom is not in the outward appearance. The reality of the kingdom is something inward. What about your heart? What about your motive? What you really are is decided not by your outward conduct but by what is in your heart. Outwardly, you may be neat, clean, pure, kind, and orderly, but inwardly, you may be completely different. Thus, you are not full of reality but full of hypocrisy and falsehood.

Here the Lord Jesus revealed His wisdom to the Pharisees and hypocrites. He dealt with the actual situation of their inward being. The Pharisees needed to realize that there was nothing good within their heart. We are the same. What comes out of our heart? Does love or purity or honesty or sincerity come out of our heart? In Matthew 15:18-19 the Lord did not mention one good

thing that issues out of our heart. This is a revelation showing us what we really are. By nature and by birth we are ruined and corrupted. Never think that you are good. Although you may outwardly seem to be good, inwardly you are defiled. If you would say to me that I appear nice outwardly, but that inwardly I am not good, I would say that you are absolutely right. Sisters, you are lovely and nice outwardly but not inwardly. By birth and by nature, we are all totally corrupted. The Lord's word shows us what proceeds out of our heart. So in the kingdom it is not a matter of outward conduct. Forget about the outward behavior. The kingdom is not a pretense; the kingdom is a reality. Do not worship God by the outward washing of your hands. The Lord does not care for that and even considers that as vain worship (vv. 8-9).

I myself was more than religious. I was taught, trained, instructed, and even built up in a religious way. I was trained to come to the meeting in a proper order and with a proper appearance. Gradually, the Lord showed me that all of this was simply the outward washing of hands. However, if we purposely and intentionally attempt to have a wild religion, that also is entirely outward. It will be an outward, unpolished religion. The kingdom is a reality, and there is nothing false in it. What does it mean to be real? It means that everything comes out of our inner being. Do not pretend. Let everything proceed out of what you are. In the kingdom life, every point and every aspect must be real and genuine. Do not be concerned about the outward appearance. We all must take care of our inward being. Yet we need to realize that our natural being is ruined and corrupted. We should not attempt to change or correct it. What, then, should we do? The answer is found in the case of the Canaanite woman (vv. 21-28).

THE CANAANITE WOMAN

Apparently, the case of the Canaanite woman is unrelated to the case of the outward washing of hands. Actually, these two are intimately related to one another. This case concerns the Lord Jesus as our food, our nourishment. We all must observe one principle when reading the book of Matthew: do not read simply according to the black and white letters, but go to the Lord and ask, "Lord, what is implied here?" Just as the title of God—*the God of Abraham and the God of Isaac and the God of Jacob*—implies resurrection, something not found in the black and white letters (22:31-32), so it is with the entire book of Matthew. Almost every verse in this book is related to the kingdom.

After speaking to the Pharisees about vain worship and about the heart of man, the Lord Jesus withdrew into the parts of Tyre and Sidon, a Gentile region. He did not go to the priests or to the temple but to the Gentile world. While He was there, a woman of Canaan, considered by the Jews as a Gentile dog, came to Him. This comes as a striking contrast when compared with the previous case of the Lord's dealing with the Pharisees. The Pharisees talked about outward things—outward washing, outward correction, and outward improvement. This was not so with the Gentile woman. In this incident, the Lord covered the matter of inward nourishment. The woman herself did not initiate the matter of nourishment; rather, she attempted to imitate the Jewish religion by calling the Lord Jesus the Son of David. This was a Jewish term, and no Gentile had the position to use it. The Lord Jesus was exceedingly wise in answering the woman. In all of human history there has never been another person as wise as He. He said, "I was not sent except to the lost sheep of the house of Israel" (15:24). This brief answer implies several things. The Lord, in effect, was saying, "If you call Me the Son of David, you should be an Israelite, but you are not. I came for the children of Israel. As the Son of David, I am not for you. You are the wrong person to address Me this way." Do not think, however, that the Lord Jesus intended to reject her. The Lord had no intention of rejecting her. He simply wanted her to realize that she did not have the position to address Him as the Son of David. Only Israelites could speak to Him in this way.

The Lord went on to say, "It is not good to take the children's bread and throw it to the little dogs" (v. 26). By this statement He implied that He had come to be bread. It also implied the position of the Canaanite woman. Her position was that of a Gentile dog. Immediately, though, that "Gentile dog" willingly took her position and claimed her portion. She no longer used the title *Son of David*. She seemed to say, "Yes, Lord, I am a Gentile dog, but even a dog has a dog's portion. The children have their portion, and their portion is on the table. The dog's portion is under the table. When the children's portion falls under the table, it becomes the dog's portion. Lord Jesus, You are the children's bread, but You have fallen under the table. Now You are not on the table of Israel, but You are here under the table at Tyre and Sidon. You have fallen to the ground beneath the table, and now You are my portion." After the Lord heard this, He granted her request.

Forget about the outward washing of hands but gather up all the crumbs of Christ and eat them. Because the Jews rejected Him, He is not on the table;

He is under the table as our portion. We are not children; we are Gentile dogs, but we are eating the children's food. By eating of Christ, we Gentile dogs will be regenerated into children.

Let me ask you quite frankly: Are you dogs or children? How can dogs be changed into children? Is it by an outward washing? If you washed a dog thirty times a day, he would still remain a dog; a dog can never be changed by washing. But the dogs can eat the crumbs, the children's food, and be transformed into children. Originally, all the kingdom people were dogs, but by feeding on the crumbs of the Lord Jesus, we have been transformed into children. Sometimes the dog's tail is still visible. Occasionally, I can see a Chinese tail, and at other times I can see an American tail. And other times I can see a Japanese or a German tail. Although we all have become children, some trace of the dog's tail remains. However, this does not bother me. I have the full assurance that after a period of time, perhaps a few months or a year, all the tails will be swallowed up by the proper eating of the Lord Jesus. It is not a matter of an outward washing of hands; it is a matter of eating the crumbs.

There is a connecting line between these two cases. The Lord Jesus said that what we take into us, meaning what we eat, does not defile us. That which comes out of us is what defiles us. What then should we take into us? We must take in the crumbs. In the first case we have the matter of taking in; in the second case we have the matter of the eating of crumbs. We will never be defiled by taking Christ into us, but anything that comes out of us will defile others. We must be careful never to allow anything to proceed out of us. Neither should we receive anything that issues out of others, for that will defile us. We should simply take in Christ and allow Him to swallow up all the ruin and uncleanness within us. We should simply eat the crumbs of Christ day by day. Then we will be clean, not by the outward washing of hands but by the inward, metabolic washing of our inner being. We will be clean by taking Christ into our being. We need to let Christ swallow us up and transform us from dogs into children.

NOT TAKING ANY LEAVEN

Following this, we have the third case in which the Lord Jesus charged His disciples not to take any leaven. "Watch and beware of the leaven of the Pharisees and Sadducees" (16:6). These three cases should be joined together.

We need to take in Christ as the crumbs, but we should not accept any leaven. We should take the bread and the crumbs of the bread but not the leaven. The Lord Jesus only gives us bread; He never gives us leaven.

The Leaven of the Pharisees

We must beware of the leaven of the Pharisees. What is the leaven of the Pharisees? It is to be religious, scriptural, fundamental, outwardly right, and yet have no life, no Spirit, no reality, and no sincerity. Please remember all these words. The hypocrisy of the Pharisees was not simply that they did evil things while pretending to be good. The hypocrisy of the Pharisees meant that they were religious, scriptural, fundamental, and outwardly right, yet they had nothing of the Spirit, of life, of reality, and of sincerity. This is leaven. This kind of leaven can still be found among Christians today. People may criticize us for shouting and praising the Lord, saying that we are crazy, while they consider themselves to be sound, good, and fundamental. In a sense, they are today's Pharisees, having no life, no Spirit, no reality, and no sincerity.

The Leaven of the Sadducees

What is the leaven of the Sadducees? The leaven of the Sadducees means to be realistic, reasonable, and philosophical. This is like the modernism of today. We may say that the modernists are modern Sadducees and that the Sadducees were the ancient modernists. They are both in the same category. They are realistic and philosophical, but they do not believe in God, in the Word of God, or in resurrection. They do not believe in anything that is divine because they are so philosophical and reasonable. There is no reality among them because they, like the Pharisees, lack the Spirit and the life. This is the leaven of the Sadducees. Today we are confronted with both fundamentalism and modernism. The leaven of the Pharisees is simply today's fundamentalism; the leaven of the Sadducees is today's modernism. We should eat the crumbs of Christ, but we should not accept any leaven.

Do not wash your hands outwardly; that means nothing. The washing of hands represents outward correction, improvement, and adjustment. To change, improve, and correct our behavior is signified by the washing of hands. The Lord Jesus is not concerned about the outward change. He is concerned about your inward being. What is within you? What is in your

heart? That is what really matters. Whatever we perform outwardly will never change us. But we have the Lord Jesus who is good for our eating. He can come into us. Although we are not qualified to eat the children's bread, we are fully qualified to eat the dog's crumbs. If the dogs eat the crumbs, they will be transformed into children. However, do not eat any leaven. While you are eating the crumbs, there is the danger that you may take in the leaven. We should separate these two things. We should take the bread but reject the leaven.

We look to the Lord that in the local churches there may be many crumbs of Christ but no leaven of fundamentalism or modernism. May there be the Spirit, the life, the reality, and the sincerity. These are the crumbs for us to enjoy. This is for the kingdom life. While we are following the Lord Jesus in the wilderness during the time of His rejection, we must take care of our eating.

If we have seen the vision from Matthew 15, we will not be concerned for the outward washing of hands. We will only care for the inward eating of the crumbs. I do not care for any outward washing. I only care for how much you have eaten the crumbs of Christ. While you are eating, beware of the leaven. When you are hungry, you need to be careful what you eat. It is wonderful to eat the crumbs, but it is better to remain hungry than to eat leaven. Both fundamentalism and modernism are leaven. Even if you are starving, do not accept any leaven. Only take Christ. The crumbs of Christ may not have such a good appearance, but they are so nourishing. You should gladly take them in. However, regardless of how good or nice it appears, never take in leaven. Do not be concerned for the outward washing of hands. Only care for the inward eating of the crumbs of Christ.

CHAPTER TWENTY-SIX

FROM REJECTION TO GLORY (3)

Scripture Reading: Matt. 16:13-17, 18-19, 21-27, 28; 17:1-2, 3-5, 8

Now we come to the last point of following the Lord Jesus during the time of His rejection. The way to follow Him is to be absolutely outside religion. In Matthew 15 there was a Canaanite woman who was enjoying Christ as the crumbs in a living and nourishing way. While this Gentile woman was enjoying Christ in such a way, the priests were worshipping in the temple, offering sacrifices and burning incense to God. It is very likely that these two things were occurring simultaneously. In a Gentile land far away from the holy place, there was a Gentile woman who knew little about God, the Scriptures, the temple, the altar, the sacrifices, the priesthood, and the worship of God. Although she knew little of these things, she was enjoying Christ as her nourishing food. At the same time, many priests who were trained in the proper worship of God were worshipping God according to the Scriptures. In a sense, these priests had much knowledge about God and what they were doing in the temple was for God and toward God.

Suppose you had lived in the land of Israel at that time. Which side would you have taken—the side of the priests worshipping in the temple or the side of the "Gentile dog"? I do not believe that any of us, including myself, would have taken the side of the "Gentile dog." We surely would have all joined the priests who were in the holy temple with the sacred Scriptures. In the holy city everything was proper and nice, but in the Gentile world there was a Gentile woman who was considered as a dog. Would you join yourself to such a person? Where was God at that time? God was with a Gentile dog. Strictly speaking, the Lord Jesus was God Himself, and He was with that woman. He was the very God whom the religious people were worshipping in the temple. However, God was not with them in the temple. He was far away in a place that was considered unworthy of Him.

The principle is exactly the same today. Christianity as a religion worships God according to the Bible, but I am afraid that God is not there. Where is God? God is wherever the Lord Jesus is. And the Lord does not care about the outward situation. He only cares for one thing—that people will take Him into

them. This is completely different from religion. The Lord did not tell the woman of Canaan, "You must learn how to worship Me. I am the very God of Israel." The Lord did not say such a thing, and He did not speak about anything religious. He did not talk about worshipping God. Instead, He talked about bread and about dogs. Is this not strange? Once again we see that Christ is versus religion.

If we would follow the Lord Jesus during the period of His rejection, we must realize five basic things: Christ, the church, Satan, the cross, and the self including the soulish life. These are five basic matters that we all must know while we are following Him in the kingdom. All the kingdom people must be familiar with them. If you remain in the "holy place," these five items cannot be revealed to you. You must leave Jerusalem, the holy place, and go to Caesarea Philippi. You must leave that religious territory in order to see a vision of these five things.

CHRIST

Who is Christ and what is Christ? After reading the last chapter, you may answer that Christ is the bread, the crumbs under the table. This is correct. However, we need to know the element, the constituent, the ingredient, or the composition of Christ. Christ is not simple. In Matthew 16:16 Peter recognized that He was the Christ, the Son of the living God. These two titles relate to the ministry of Christ and the person of Christ. *The Son of God* is the title of His person; *Christ* is the title of His ministry or work. As to His person, He is the embodiment of God. As the Son of God, He is the very expression of God and the embodiment of God. All of God is embodied and expressed through Him as the Son of God.

He is also the Christ of God. *Christ* means "the anointed One." The Son of God was anointed by God to accomplish God's purpose. He was anointed and appointed to fulfill the purpose of God. In accomplishing God's purpose, He took several major steps. First was the step of creation. Second was the step of incarnation. The following steps were crucifixion, resurrection, ascension, and descension. After this, He established and is building the church. In the future, He will take a further step—to set up the kingdom of God on earth. By this we can see that from the creation through the establishing of the kingdom, Christ took a number of basic steps. All these are the major steps of Christ's ministry. For this work He has the title of *Christ*. To know Him as Christ we

must understand all these major steps in His work, and to know Him as the Son of God we must know Him as the very embodiment and expression of God.

Christ is marvelous and profound. It is not easy to realize who He is. Christ is not poor—He is all-inclusive. In Ephesians 3:8 Paul says that he preached the unsearchable riches of Christ. Consider His person: He is the embodiment and expression of God. Consider His ministry, the major steps of His work: creation, incarnation, crucifixion, resurrection, ascension, descension, the building of the church, and the establishing of the kingdom. What a work is this! The riches of Christ are unsearchable. Day by day in the churches, all the kingdom people need to know Christ in such a rich way. If we need doctrines, we need the kind of doctrine that reveals all the riches of Christ to us.

THE CHURCH

What is the church? We need many words to describe the church. Here I can only mention a few points. No one can surpass the Lord Jesus in His speaking. His word is simple, yet it is profound and full of implications. He told Peter, "You are a stone" (Matt. 16:18, lit.). We need to see that we are stones for the building. Matthew 16:18 mentions both a stone and a rock. We are all stones, and the rock is Christ. Both the stones and the rock are for the building. The church is built with Christ as the rock and with us as the stones. We may have the rock and the stones, but we need the building. Many seeking Christians talk a great deal about the Body, but they neglect the building. They simply discuss the Body in a doctrinal way, but we must have the building in a practical way. In every respect this building is a practical matter.

SATAN

The Lord goes on to mention the gates of Hades (v. 18). Hades is the place where the dead are kept, and *the gates of Hades*is a term denoting the authority of death, which is the power of Satan. It also represents Satan, the embodiment of death. As the Lord Jesus is the embodiment of life, so Satan is the embodiment of death, represented in Matthew 16:18 by the gates of Hades. The church is built with the rock and the stones. Wherever you find the building of the church, there will be warfare, because the power of death will rise up against it. But the power of death can never prevail against the church. Death may prevail against individual Christians but not against the builded

church. In every battle against the church, Satan will be defeated. Satan can never prevail, because the church can bind. Is Satan able to bind? Some Christians seem to have more faith in Satan than in the Lord Jesus. They constantly talk about the power of Satan, saying that they do not know how to handle it. However, in the local churches we not only bind the strong man, but we also plunder his house and seize all his vessels. The builded church has the authority to bind the strong man. This is not my word; this is the word of the Lord Jesus. "You are a stone (lit.), and upon this rock I will build My church, and the gates of Hades shall not prevail against it" (v. 18). We must stand upon this word. The gates of Hades shall never prevail against the church. The church can bind, and whatever the church binds, the heavens will bind (v. 19).

The keys of the kingdom are for the producing of the church, and the church life is the kingdom. Eventually, we can see five points regarding the church: the rock, the stones, the building, the defeat of the gates of Hades, and the kingdom. The church is the kingdom. If we are going to realize the builded church today, not a church in doctrine or in talk, the church must be built up with many living stones. The local churches are built with stones upon the rock. This is the kingdom. Because the kingdom has the authority to bind and loose, it can never be defeated by the gates of Hades.

THE SELF

Satan is first represented by the gates of Hades. In addition to this, Satan is incarnated in the self. On the one hand, Peter was a stone; on the other hand, he suddenly became Satan (v. 23). It is hard for us to imagine that this could be. Peter became Satan because his self was the incarnation of Satan. The Lord rebuked Peter, saying, "Get behind Me, Satan!" Satan could never be successful simply by exercising the power of the gates of Hades. Satan is far more subtle than that. He not only employs the power of Hades; he also gets into us and works himself into our inward being. This is a dreadful, subtle thing. Satan cannot prevail against the church by his power of death, but he can damage the church by his subtlety. Where is Satan's subtlety? His subtlety resides in the self of man. If we read Matthew 16:23-26 very carefully, we will see the connection between four items—the natural mind, the self, the soulish life, and Satan. The Lord Jesus rebuked Peter for being Satan because Peter's mind was on the things of men, not on the things of God. Later the Lord spoke about the soul and denying the self. In a few brief sentences the Lord

mentioned Satan, the mind, the self, and the soulish life. These four things are actually four-in-one. Satan is in your mind, your mind is in your self, and your self is in the soulish life. Wherever there is the soul-life, there is the self; wherever there is the self, there is the mind; wherever there is the mind, there is Satan. Although Satan cannot prevail against the church by exercising his power and authority, he can damage the church by his subtlety of being one with you in your mind. Satan's subtlety is to unite with you in your mind, in your opinion, and in your dissenting thought. If in any church there is a dissenting situation, that situation is of the mind, of Satan, of the self, and of the soulish life. It makes no difference about the reason for your dissenting opinion. As long as you are dissenting, you are under the subtlety of Satan. All dissenting elements are found not in your spirit but in your mind. If you exercise your mind, you will immediately have dissenting opinions.

What then shall we do? Do not say now that we should bind the strong man; that is the wrong weapon. Rather, keep yourself on the cross. Whenever you keep yourself on the cross, you will see that Satan is destroyed. By death Christ destroyed him who has the might of death (Heb. 2:14). As the subtle one, Satan is not afraid of our binding, but he is afraid of the cross. If we remain on the cross, Satan will be terrified.

In this short portion of the Word, we have two descriptions of Satan: the gates of Hades and the self in the mind with the soul-life. Do not think that only the gates of Hades are Satan. You must realize that the self also is Satan incarnated. Peter became occupied by Satan because he forgot his spirit and exercised his mind, expressing his dissenting thought. Every dissenting thought is the incarnation of Satan. Do not listen to any dissenting thoughts. The best way to kill Satan is to put your dissenting thoughts on the cross.

May we all receive a clear vision! Christ is here, and the church is here, but that subtle one, Satan, is also here. Your dissenting thoughts, like Peter's, may spring from a good intention, but you are nevertheless possessed by Satan. As long as you cling to your dissenting opinions, you will either be obsessed or possessed. In the local churches we all must be alert against any dissenting thought.

The Lord Jesus told the disciples that He was going to Jerusalem to be killed and to be raised on the third day. However, Peter's dissenting mind stopped at the word *killed*. Dissenting ones seldom listen to other people to

the end, so they seldom understand others to the full extent. Because he was dissenting, he was shortsighted and missed the mark. He heard the word *killed,* but he missed the main point of resurrection. Without crucifixion there can never be resurrection.

All the saints in the church life must be very careful about dissenting. Never dissent. Dissenting is just the awful exercise of the mind. Regardless of your intention, as long as you are dissenting, you have been snared by the subtle one. Do not think that you are so holy and so spiritual. Within a very short period of time the Lord called Peter "a stone" and "Satan." The stone became Satan. You may say that you love the church, and I have no doubt that you do. You may feel that whatever you say is spoken with a good intention. Many dear saints have damaged the church and yet claim that they had a good intention, that they loved the church. It is not a matter of a good or bad intention. You must ask yourself whether or not you are dissenting. Are you one with the church? Only oneness keeps you alive, and only oneness kills the enemy. Tell the enemy, "Satan, I don't care for these reasonings. I only care for the oneness of the Body. I don't care about anything else. For the sake of the Body I will not exercise my dissenting mind. I will go to my spirit and stay there." This is what it means to take the cross.

THE CROSS

Now we come to the cross. The best place to keep your self is on the cross. Do not claim that you have a good intention; that is merely an excuse to hide the self. Do not say that you love the church—that is another excuse, another dwelling place, for the self. The proper place for you to keep your self is on the cross. Constantly, by the grace of the Lord, you need to tell yourself, "Little self, remember that your place is on the cross. Don't go anywhere else. You were put on the cross two thousand years ago. Now go back to the cross and stay there. Don't get off the cross. The cross is the place for you." This is the true meaning of the Lord's word in Matthew 16:24. To bear the cross is to realize that you have been put on the cross already. Since the Lord has put you on the cross, you now need to bear it. One saint in the Lord said something that is very good: "If you will bear the cross, the cross eventually will bear you." Christ has put you on the cross; now you must bear the cross and keep your position on the cross. Do not come off the cross, and do not leave your position. Stay there. Eventually, the cross will bear you. The cross will not be a burden to you; you will become a burden to the cross. Do not

argue, do not reason, and do not make excuses—just keep yourself on the cross.

THE SELF AND THE SOULISH LIFE

Now we come to the last item, the self, including the soulish life. The soulish life is in our self, and the self is in our mind. In Matthew 16:23-25 we find the mind, the self, and the soulish life. The Lord Jesus told Peter that his mind was not set on the things of God and that he needed to deny himself and follow the Lord. The mind, the self, and the soulish life are all related to the soul and in fact are in the soul. These things are absolutely different from the spirit. We all must learn to do one thing: turn to the spirit and stay on the cross. This is the way to grow, to be transformed, and to be fully occupied and possessed by the Lord Jesus. This is what it means to gain an extra portion of oil in the vessel, and this is also what it means to allow Christ to make His home in our hearts. This is the growth of the kingdom, the gradual coming of the kingdom. If we practice turning to the spirit and staying on the cross, we will be matured, and the kingdom will come. After we have seen Christ, the church, and Satan as the power of Hades and as the subtle one, we need to see that the self must be kept on the cross. If we will turn to the spirit and keep the self on the cross, we will be in the kingdom. Eventually, we will experience the full coming of the kingdom.

A REWARD

In Matthew 16:27 the Lord Jesus spoke of coming in the glory of the Father with a reward for His people. This does not refer to salvation, because salvation is not a reward but a gift. A gift is free; a reward requires us to pay a price. When the Lord comes in the glory of the Father, He will reward us. What is this reward? It is the marriage feast mentioned in Matthew 25. The ones who are ready will be rewarded with the marriage feast. If you have the extra portion of oil, meaning that you are prepared, matured, possessed, and occupied by Christ, you will enter into the marriage feast as your reward. I am quite concerned that so many among us may miss this reward. They are saved, but they may miss the reward of the marriage feast. We have already considered the five foolish virgins who were truly saved but who were not allowed to enter into the marriage feast. They could never lose their salvation, yet they were unable to enter the marriage feast. To be saved is one thing; to enter the marriage feast is another. To be saved is a matter of salvation; to be

in the marriage feast is a matter of reward. How can we obtain this reward? It is by denying the soulish life, by denying the self, and by keeping the self on the cross.

TWO KINGDOMS

Now we can see the bylaws of the two kingdoms. If you remain in your mind, you are for the kingdom of Satan. If you turn to your spirit, you are for the kingdom of God. If you stay in your mind, you are for the spreading of the kingdom of Satan. If you turn to your spirit, you are for the spreading of the kingdom of God. The spreading of the kingdom of God today is the growth of the church. If you stay in your mind, the growth of the church will be severely limited, even torn down, affording Satan an opportunity to increase his kingdom. So you must keep yourself on the cross. Then you must turn to the spirit. As you continue turning to the spirit, you will know the spreading of the kingdom until it reaches maturity. Once you have reached maturity, you will be in the full coming of the kingdom. Then not only the Lord Jesus but you also will be transfigured. You will be transfigured to be exactly like Christ. Then Philippians 3:20-21 will be completely fulfilled; our physical body will be changed into the likeness of the glorious body of Christ. That will be our transfiguration, and that will be the full coming of the kingdom of God.

In the kingdom there will be nothing except the Lord Jesus. There will be no more Moses and no more Elijah (Matt. 17:8). This means that there will be no more law and no more prophets. Neither will there be any more religion. Whenever the Lord Jesus brings in the kingdom, nothing remains except Him.

CHAPTER TWENTY-SEVEN

SOME PRACTICAL MATTERS CONCERNING THE KINGDOM LIFE

Scripture Reading: Matt. 17:1-8, 14-21, 24-27; 18:1-4, 17, 21-22, 33-35; 19:3-8; Rom. 14:1-6

CASTING OUT THE DEMONS

In Matthew 17:1-8 we are shown a miniature of the full manifestation of the kingdom. This chapter presents a contrast. On the one hand, there is the kingdom on the mountaintop, and on the other hand, there are demons in the valley. This is a picture of today's situation. Sometimes in the church meetings, it seems that we are on the mountaintop enjoying the Lord's transfiguration. But the world and human society are full of demons. We need to exercise our faith and pray, even with fasting, to cast out these demons. Why are there so many demons? The Lord Jesus gave us the reason: it is an unbelieving and perverted generation (v. 17). Toward God this generation is unbelieving; toward themselves they are perverted. Because of this degraded situation the demons have many opportunities to possess people. We need to realize both sides of this situation. On the one side is the mountaintop with the transfiguration of the Lord Jesus, and on the other side is the plain with the demons. We need to come down from the mountaintop and cast out the demons. Of course, this does not mean that we must cast out every demon, but at least we must cast out some of them. We must release some of the demon-possessed people by prayer and fasting (vv. 14-21).

THE KINGDOM BEING FLEXIBLE

In Matthew 17:24-27 we have Peter's answer to the poll tax gatherers who inquired if the Lord Jesus paid the temple tax. As we have seen on another occasion (see *Christ versus Religion*), Peter answered wrongly because this tribute was not paid to the Roman Empire but to the temple. On the mountaintop the Lord Jesus had revealed to Peter that He was the Son of God. The temple belonged to God, and as the Son of God, the Lord Jesus was the Son of the Owner of the temple and thus had no need to pay tribute. However,

Peter had forgotten the vision he received on the mountaintop. He had seen the vision, but when a practical situation arose, he was unable to apply it. When Peter came into the house, the Lord Jesus asked him if the sons of the king needed to pay tribute. Peter then realized that he had answered incorrectly, but the Lord Jesus said, "That we do not stumble them, go to the sea and cast a hook, and take the first fish that comes up. And when you open its mouth, you will find a stater; take that and give it to them for Me and you" (v. 27). If you want to know the details of this incident, read *Christ versus Religion*. In this chapter I want to point out primarily one matter—in the kingdom life we need to be flexible regarding matters that are not related to morality. In the kingdom we need reality, but we do not need legality. In religion there is no flexibility. For instance, you must observe the Sabbath. With the Lord Jesus, in a sense, it is permissible to pay the tribute and, in another sense, it is permissible not to pay the tribute. By being flexible, we may either pay or not pay.

When I was young, I was bothered by Romans 14 because it seemed that Paul was too liberal about eating and about the keeping of days. Paul said that it was right either to observe a day or not to observe a day. I wanted to ask him, "Brother Paul, which is wrong and which is right?" But Paul said, "He who regards that day, regards it to the Lord; and he who eats, eats to the Lord, for he gives thanks to God; and he who does not eat, does not eat to the Lord, and he gives thanks to God" (v. 6). To Paul both were acceptable. Could you imagine that a great teacher like Paul had such a liberal attitude in the matter of keeping of days and in the matter of eating? In Romans 14 and 1 Corinthians 8, Paul speaks about eating meat that was sacrificed to idols. When I was young, I simply could not reconcile these portions of the Word. In some verses it seemed that he was very strong against eating the idol sacrifices, and in other verses he said that it was permissible to eat. Later on, by experience, I was able to understand Paul's meaning: in some situations you may not eat sacrifices offered to idols, and in other situations you may eat them. You need to be flexible, not legal.

A number of saints in the churches have been baptized more than once. Some people have said this is wrong, that they should be baptized only once. Where does the Bible say that it is wrong to be baptized more than once? I cannot find such a verse. I am not advocating re-baptism, but I am fighting against legality. Many young members of the denominations gamble and do other evil things, but they receive little criticism. But when some young ones

were captured by the Lord and felt that they were old and dead and wanted to bury themselves in the waters of baptism once again, they were criticized. Those who criticize do not care for life; they only care for their legality. In religion there is legality, but in the kingdom there is flexibility.

"Does not your Teacher pay the temple tax?" (Matt. 17:24). How would you have answered if you had been Peter? We all must learn to answer this way: "He may pay the tribute, or He may not pay." If we asked Paul whether we should observe the days or not, he would reply, "You may observe them, or you may not." It makes no difference whether you keep the days or not, and it makes no difference whether you are baptized one time or three times. Do not be bothered by outward legality. The form of religion is maintained by legality. If you removed the legalities, religion would collapse because it has nothing of reality supporting it. All the support for religion is found in legalities.

Judaism was supported by three main legalities: circumcision, keeping the Sabbath, and dietary regulations. If you were born into Judaism, you were circumcised on the eighth day. Then you were required to observe the Sabbath every seventh day and to follow the dietary regulations for your entire life. These three legalities were the pillars of Judaism. When the Lord Jesus appeared, He abolished the Sabbath regulations (12:11). In Acts 10:9-15 the Holy Spirit abolished the dietary regulations, and in Galatians 5:2-6 the apostle Paul abolished circumcision. If these three supports of Judaism were taken away, Judaism would collapse. In the same manner, Christianity utilizes many such legalities to support itself as a religion, but the Lord desires to abolish the legalities.

Look at the situation today. It is full of demons. We must exercise our faith and pray for others, sometimes with fasting, to cast out the demons and to rescue some of the possessed persons. As to ourselves, we should be flexible and have no legalities. I may cut my hair short, or I may let it grow long. I may have a beard, or I may shave. Either is right. I may shout, or I may be quiet. I may close my eyes to pray, or I may gaze into the heavens with my eyes wide open. Neither is wrong. I may say the words *in the name of the Lord Jesus*, or I may not say them and yet still pray in the name of the Lord Jesus. We should have no legalities but be very flexible.

THE PROPER CHURCH LIFE FOR THE KINGDOM

Now we come to Matthew 18. In this chapter the Holy Spirit put some points together to show us how to have the proper church life for the kingdom. The proper church life is the reality of the kingdom. If we have the proper church life, we have the reality of the kingdom.

Being like Little Children

First, we should learn to be humble. We all need to be converted and to become like little children. There should be no giants among us; we should all be like little children. None of us have titles, for we are all children. The disciples asked the Lord Jesus, "Who then is greatest in the kingdom of the heavens?" (v. 1). Everyone wants to be great. The Lord Jesus answered, "He therefore who will humble himself like this little child, he is the greatest in the kingdom of the heavens" (v. 4). Can you tell us who are the great ones in the local churches? Such a concept does not originate from the kingdom of the heavens but from the kingdom of darkness. The concept of greatness comes from the kingdom of Satan. If you desire to have the proper church life, the first thing you must realize is that there are no giants in the local churches. All the church people should be little people. We should be like little children.

Being Dependent upon One Another

Next, we should realize that little children are very dependent on others. Every giant, on the contrary, is an independent person. Many Christians want to be independent, to exercise their character, and to be strong in themselves. In the local churches we all must be dependent like little children. I need you, and you likewise need me. None of us can afford to be independent; we are all dependent upon one another. Little children depend upon one another and recognize their need for a home. Whenever they have problems, they simply refer the problems to their home, and they listen to their home. A giant does not listen to his home. Even if a giant does have a problem, he may hide the problem from his home. It is so good to be able to tell our problems to the church. We should realize that we are little children who are dependent on our home. It is terrible not to listen to the church. In Matthew 18:17 the Lord Jesus said that if anyone will not hear the church, he should be considered as a Gentile and a tax collector. These were very ugly terms in the Lord's time. If you were a Gentile or a tax collector, you were considered to be mean and defiled. If we do not listen to the church, then in the eyes of the Lord and in the eyes of the church, we too become mean and defiled. This is very serious.

In the proper church life we all are little children who depend upon our home. We refer our problems to our home, and we listen to what the home says about them. We have covered more about this matter in the book *How to Meet*.

Forgiving Others

In Matthew 18 we see a third aspect of the proper church life—the little children living at home are quick and ready to forgive others. Peter considered that forgiving his brother seven times was sufficient, but the word of the Lord Jesus was "seventy times seven." That indicates forgiving endlessly, continually ready to forgive. If someone offends you in the morning, you need to forgive him. If he offends you again at noon, you need to forgive him then. If he offends you tomorrow, the next day, and the day following, you will need to forgive him every time. The Lord Jesus did not speak in a light way. What does it mean to forgive? To forgive is to forget. If you cannot forget, it means that you have never forgiven.

Once, a brother came to me, saying, "Brother, let me tell you what a certain person did to me...He really offended me, but I forgave him." Immediately, I told this brother, "Your forgiveness is quite different from the forgiveness in the Bible. The Bible says that to forgive is to forget. You say that you have forgiven your brother, but you remember everything well enough to repeat it to me. This means that you have not forgiven your brother because you have not forgotten the offense." When God forgives us, He forgets. Although God is omniscient and omnipotent, He is able to forget. He simply cannot recall our failures and transgressions. Once He forgives them, He forgets them.

In the local churches the problems always concern this matter of forgiving. For example, when we first come together to practice the church life, everyone and everything is wonderful. After a while, although everyone is nice, some friction gradually arises. Unintentionally, you offend me and I offend you. Sometimes you look at my countenance and feel that I am not happy with you, and sometimes I listen to your voice and think that you are not pleased with me. These things happen again and again. Therefore, we need the forgiving grace. We need to forgive all and to forget all. Whenever we forgive and forget, we have new life in the church. By forgetting all of the frictions, failures, and offenses, we become new. The church becomes a new church. Otherwise, our church will become an old wrinkled church. When a person becomes old, he

develops wrinkles. If you visit a church that has been in existence for ten years, you can see wrinkles. What are the wrinkles? They are the unwillingness to forgive and forget. Apparently, you are willing to forgive; actually, you are unwilling to forget. This unwillingness to forget the failures of others produces many wrinkles. Thus, the church becomes an old church. If we will forgive by forgetting, every wrinkle will be removed. Every day the church will be a new church with no oldness, failures, transgressions, or offenses because all these things have been mutually forgotten.

This must be applied to your family life and especially to your marriage. You need to forgive your wife day by day and hour by hour. This means that you forget all that your dear wife has done to you. If you forget all the offenses, your wife will always be lovable, and you will have a good family life. However, if you remember even a few things that she has done to you, immediately she will cease to be lovable. You need to forgive and forget.

Matthew 18 reveals the practical way to have the church life. In this chapter we need to be converted and to become humble little children. We need to depend on others, and we need to forgive and forget. If we practice these things, we will have a very living church.

A HIGH STANDARD OF MORALITY

Now we go on to chapter 19 to consider another point. Here, the first point that is raised does not concern legality but a high standard of morality. In the kingdom we should not insist on any legality, but we must maintain high moral standards. We must have the highest morality, as high as God Himself. Thus, we must go back to the beginning. Matters such as paying tribute and length of hair are not matters of morality, and we may be flexible concerning them. In the kingdom there is absolutely no legality. However, we are still human and must maintain God's standard for humanity. As far as humanity is concerned, nothing is more important than morality. In its seriousness, immorality is next to idolatry. Nothing is more insulting to God than idolatry, and nothing is more damaging to humanity than immorality. In both the Old and New Testaments, God never allowed anyone to be involved in the worship of idols. Also, in both the Old and the New Testaments, God never allowed any of His children to be involved in immorality. The standard of morality must be high and absolute. At the end of chapter 17, the Lord Jesus was very flexible regarding the matter of paying tribute. Whether He paid the tribute or

not made no difference—He could be flexible. But do not say that it makes no difference whether we are moral or immoral. We can never say this.

The Pharisees tempted the Lord Jesus concerning divorce. Immediately, He referred them back to the very beginning of the Scriptures, taking them to the first two chapters in Genesis, and telling them that according to God's economy there is one husband with one wife and one wife for one husband. When a man and a woman are married, they become one flesh, a oneness that should never be broken. "Therefore what God has yoked together, let man not separate" (Matt. 19:6). However, the Pharisees used Scriptures to argue with the Lord. They said that Moses allowed them to give a certificate of divorce. The Lord Jesus responded by saying, "Moses, because of your hardness of heart, allowed you to divorce your wives, but from the beginning it has not been so" (v. 8). What Moses tolerated was not up to God's standard. In the beginning we see what was right according to God's standard.

In the kingdom we should have no legality, but we must maintain the highest morality. I hope that this will be proclaimed loudly in all the local churches because this is an age of immorality. Look at the situation in America and in every country today. What a shame! Nevertheless, we are the kingdom, and the kingdom must be filled with the highest morality. May we all learn to have no legality but to maintain the highest morality.

CHAPTER TWENTY-EIGHT

THE REWARD OF THE KINGDOM

Scripture Reading: Matt. 19:13-15, 16-30; 20:1-16

In this chapter we will cover Matthew 19:13 through 20:16. Although this is a long portion of the Word, it is nevertheless quite simple. The parable found in Matthew 20:1-16 is a definition of the Lord's words at the close of chapter 19. This passage begins with little children being brought to the Lord Jesus. When the disciples tried to prevent the children from receiving the Lord's blessing, the Lord rebuked them, and laying His hands on the children, He blessed them. This reminds us once again that the kingdom people must be like little children. Whether we are old or young, we all need to be like little children. Children are very simple. They are poor in spirit and, in a sense, pure in heart, fulfilling the requirements of Matthew chapter 5. For the sake of the kingdom we need to be poor in spirit and pure in heart. Because children are not rich, it is quite easy for them to be like this. Grownups, on the contrary, are rich. Some are rich physically, others are rich psychologically, and still others are rich in their dreams. They dream of being rich. Little children are poor in every sense of the word. We must rid ourselves of such dreams and become like little children. If we fail to become like little children, we will be like a rich man coming to the Lord.

A RICH MAN

Following the incident with the children, we are told of a rich man who came to the Lord Jesus seeking eternal life (19:16-26). He was seeking the zoe life. He already had the bios, the physical life, and the psuche, the soulish life. Now he was seeking after the zoe life, the divine and eternal life, which he thought he could inherit by doing good. Addressing the Lord as "Teacher," he asked, "What good thing shall I do that I may have eternal life?" (v. 16). The Lord Jesus was very wise, and His answer revealed something very significant. The Lord responded, "Why do you ask Me concerning what is good? There is only One who is good" (v. 17). What does this reveal? It tells us that if we call the Lord good, we must recognize that He is God, for no one is good except God. The Lord was saying that if you call Me good, you must recognize that I am God.

We should not think of ourselves as good, because we are not God. Only God is good. This indicates that we are unable to do anything good because we ourselves are not good. How can a man who is not good do something good? It is impossible. Can an evil tree bring forth good fruit? (7:18). We are not good. We must be convinced that we cannot do anything good. If we consider ourselves to be good, this is blasphemy against God. We all must realize that we are not good because we are not God. Only God is good.

The Lord Jesus told this rich young man that if he wanted to enter into life he had to keep the commandments. When the young man asked which commandments, the Lord enumerated six: not to murder, not to commit adultery, not to steal, not to bear false witness, to honor his parents, and to love his neighbor as himself. The young man replied, "All these things I have kept. What do I still lack?" (v. 20). Although this was not his real condition, the Lord Jesus did not argue with him. The Lord Jesus simply said to him, "If you want to be perfect, go, sell your possessions and give to the poor, and you will have treasure in the heavens; and come, follow Me" (v. 21). The Lord's words were a real test of his genuine love for his neighbor. The Lord Jesus did not rebuke him; He simply placed the facts before him. As a result, the young man was exposed and went away sorrowing.

Then the Lord Jesus said to His disciples, "Truly I say to you, Only with difficulty will a rich man enter into the kingdom of the heavens...It is easier for a camel to pass through the eye of a needle than for a rich man to enter into the kingdom of God" (vv. 23-24). This saying is an expression showing impossibility. It is impossible for a camel to go through the eye of a needle. When the disciples heard this, they were disappointed. Because they did not understand, they asked, "Who then can be saved?" (v. 25). He answered, "With men this is impossible, but with God all things are possible" (v. 26). For a rich man to be saved is like a camel trying to go through the eye of a needle. It is impossible with man. But God is able to enlarge the eye of the needle, and He can also reduce the size of the camel. You are unable to do it, but God can. Therefore, do not be concerned—be at peace.

Once again, we see that Peter appeared. Thank the Lord for Peter! Without such a good brother, many things would not have been exposed. When the Lord Jesus told the rich man to sell all that he had, Peter certainly heard. When he heard, he compared it to what he and his brother had done in leaving the fishing wharf and following the Lord Jesus. The Lord Jesus had

said to Peter and Andrew, “Come after Me,” and immediately they had given up everything and followed Him (4:19-20). To a certain extent, Peter was boasting: “This rich man could not give up everything, but we did. Lord, when You called us, we came. You asked us to follow You, and we did. We have forsaken everything. Now, Lord, what are You going to give us?” The Lord Jesus’ answer shows that He is good and that He is God. He told Peter that he would receive exactly what he should receive. “You who have followed Me, in the restoration, when the Son of Man sits on the throne of His glory, you also shall sit on twelve thrones, judging the twelve tribes of Israel” (19:28). The Lord further promised that everyone who forsakes mother and father, brothers and sisters, and all that they have for His name’s sake will receive a hundred times as much and will inherit eternal life. He went on to tell Peter that “many first will be last, and many last first” (vv. 29-30). Why did He tell Peter “many first will be last, and many last first”? It was because Peter thought that he was able to pay the price of buying the kingdom, but the Lord was indicating to him that the kingdom is priceless and that he could never purchase it. The kingdom is of peerless worth, and its price is too high. He could never afford to buy it. What He had asked Peter to give up was not the price of gaining the kingdom. He had simply asked Peter to give up the frustrations. The kingdom is not a recompense; it is a reward. Peter needed to realize that the kingdom was not something he could buy at any price. He would never have sufficient means to buy the kingdom. The Lord had only asked him to forsake every entanglement and frustration. Then he would receive the kingdom as a reward, not as a recompense. The Lord did not act according to the commercial principle which says that the more you pay, the more you receive. Peter’s concept was too commercial. The Lord was washing away that commercial concept by saying, “Many first will be last, and many last first.” How wise is the Lord Jesus!

LABORERS IN THE KINGDOM

The Lord Jesus next spoke a parable to further illustrate the impossibility of earning the kingdom or of paying a certain price for it. He told of a householder who had a vineyard and who went out early in the morning, as the ancient custom was, to hire workmen (20:1-16). At six o’clock the householder hired workmen and agreed to pay them a denarius for the day’s labor. Later, at the third hour, meaning nine o’clock in the morning, he found others standing idle in the marketplace, whom he also hired, offering them a just wage. At the sixth and ninth hours—at noon and at three in the

afternoon—the owner went to the marketplace again, found more idle people, and hired them to work for a suitable wage. Two hours later, at five o'clock, he went out once again and hired still more idle people.

At six o'clock in the evening the householder paid the workmen. What happened was quite unusual. He started to pay from the last, not from the first. Altogether, there were five groups: the six-o'clock-in-the-morning group, the nine-o'clock group, the twelve-o'clock group, the three-o'clock group, and the five-o'clock group. The master of the vineyard paid the last group first and concluded with the first group. The agreement between the master and the workmen in the first group was for one denarius for twelve hours' work. They worked from six in the morning until six in the evening. Starting with the last group, the master gave each man a denarius. Peter must have thought to himself, "Those new ones came in at five o'clock in the afternoon and have received a denarius for working only one hour. The others worked twelve times as long and certainly should receive twelve times as much." This is the commercial way of thinking. The master eventually paid the same amount to those in the first group. Those who had worked from the early morning were angry with their master, saying, "These last ones worked one hour, and you have made them equal to us who bore the burden of the day and the scorching heat" (v. 12). Then the householder asked them, "Is it not lawful for me to do what I wish with what is mine?" (v. 15). The Lord seemed to be speaking to Peter, "Didn't I make an agreement with you, Peter? You gave up everything to follow Me, and I agreed to give you a denarius. I have given you what I promised. I told you that the first will be last and that the last will be first." This same expression is found both in Matthew 19:30 and Matthew 20:16, proving that the parable is a definition of the Lord's words to Peter in Matthew 19:27-30.

This parable signifies the whole age of grace. The time early in the morning denotes the time when the Lord Jesus called Peter, Andrew, James, and John to enter into the kingdom. He called them and hired them, and they gave up everything for the kingdom. This parable is very meaningful in the eyes of the Lord. It indicates that unless you forsake everything for the kingdom, you are an idle person. You may be a doctor or a professor, but if you do not give up everything for the kingdom, the Lord considers you an idle person. In the entire universe God has only one work and one purpose—to establish His kingdom. If you are not in this work, you are idle. If we sacrifice all that we are and have for God's kingdom, it means that we have been hired by God to

work for Him. We are no longer idle and jobless; we have the proper job. If we do anything else on earth, in the eyes of God we are idle.

In the first century, the Lord Jesus came and saw some idle fishermen. These He hired to work in His vineyard. Throughout the following centuries the Lord has been calling people to labor in His vineyard. Probably the present time is five o'clock in the afternoon of the age of grace. The United States is large and wealthy, but in the eyes of the Lord few are working. Most are idle. The Lord has called us and hired us at five o'clock. We will be working for the kingdom for a short time, and then we may be the first ones to receive the reward. How marvelous! We may be rewarded before Peter, John, and James. I laughed at Peter when I read this parable. He was called much earlier than we, but we may receive the reward first. I am sure that the Lord Jesus will not pay him more than He pays us.

Do you not believe that we are the ones called at five o'clock in the afternoon? Do you think that this is still the noontime of the age of grace? What time is it? I believe that it is late in the afternoon of the dispensation of grace. Perhaps brothers like J. N. Darby and George Müller were called at three o'clock, but we were called at five. When the rewards are given, we may be first. Will you not laugh at Peter? "Brother Peter, you made a good bargain, but we have received the benefits." I am very happy that I was born in the twentieth century. I am glad that I was called not early in the morning but at this time, in the late afternoon of the age of grace.

This parable reveals that the kingdom is not a matter of commerce. The Lord Jesus is not selling the kingdom, regardless of the price we are willing to pay. Do not have a commercialized mentality. The reward of the kingdom is altogether a matter of the Lord's gracious doing according to His will.

We must realize that none of us are good. Therefore, we must be poor in spirit. We need to be like little children. As far as we are concerned, there is no hope. But what is impossible with us is possible with Him. We simply need to give up the entanglements, frustrations, and distractions. We must forsake all these things. However, we should never think that what we give up constitutes the price we pay to purchase the reward of the kingdom. Whatever we do or give constitutes nothing and amounts to nothing. Never think that you can buy the reward of the kingdom. We do need to give up all frustrations and entanglements, but the Lord will not give us the kingdom as a

commercial transaction. The kingdom comes to us from the Lord's gracious giving according to His own will. In order to prove that the kingdom is not a matter of commerce but of the Lord's gracious giving, He will reward the last first and the first last.

He will give the reward of the kingdom first to those who were called last. In all these chapters we have said a great deal about the kingdom. Some of you may be discouraged, thinking this is too hard and too high for you. Or, along with Peter, you may be thinking that one day you may be able to purchase the kingdom. Both thoughts are wrong. We must realize that by ourselves we can never make it. We must put all our trust in the Lord. With us it is impossible; with God it is altogether possible. Never consider that what you have given up to follow the Lord amounts to the price that will purchase the kingdom. The Lord will give you the reward of the kingdom as an act of goodness. It comes from the Lord's gracious giving. Never think of the kingdom in a commercial way. Give up the commercialized mentality. If we have seen the principle revealed in this parable, we will be very much encouraged. We will say, "Hallelujah! It is impossible with me, but it is absolutely possible with Him!" The kingdom is not something that we can buy. It is a matter of the Lord's gracious giving. We simply cooperate with Him. If He calls us, we just answer. If He asks us to follow Him, we follow Him. If He asks us to give up something, we will rid ourselves of all entanglements, frustrations, and distractions in order to go along with Him. What we give up means nothing and amounts to nothing. The kingdom is priceless. It is the Lord's gracious gift. He will give the kingdom to us by His will and by His goodness. I am very happy to tell you that we may be the laborers called at five o'clock in the afternoon. We may be the last group to be called into the vineyard. Now we are here working for God's eternal purpose, for God's kingdom.

CHAPTER TWENTY-NINE

AMBITION FOR POSITION BEING CONTRARY TO THE KINGDOM LIFE

Scripture Reading: Matt. 20:20-28; 23:8-12; 21:4-9, 15-16, 23-27, 28-32, 33-45

Now we need to consider several passages in Matthew that are connected by a single underlying thought: ambition for position. The first portion is Matthew 20:20-28. There we see that the ambition to be great, to be a leader, and to be in authority is deep within fallen man. The source of this ambition is the rebellion of Satan. The man whom God created did not have the nature of being ambitious, of desiring leadership and greatness, or of possessing authority. The source of this ambitious nature is not the creation of God but the rebellion of Satan. This ambition for position is in Satan's fallen nature. Satan fell because of his ambition. Isaiah 14 and Ezekiel 28 reveal that Satan was originally a high cherub, an archangel, who was quite good when he was created. But at a certain time he entertained the thought of being equal with God and rebelling against God. This is the fallen nature of the devil. When man was tempted by the devil and fell, the evil nature of Satan was injected into him. Thus, within the human nature of both men and women is the ambition of being greater than others, of being the "chief." If you are a sister, you certainly will want to be the chief sister. If you are unable to be the chief among ten thousand, at least you want to be the chief among ten. This is our fallen nature.

THE TWO SONS OF ZEBEDEE

When the mother of the two sons of Zebedee requested that her sons sit at the Lord's right and left hand in the kingdom, the Lord Jesus exposed the ambition of fallen man. Not only did those two disciples have such an evil ambition, but the others had it as well. The other ten were very indignant over the request of these two, indicating that all twelve disciples were exactly the same. They were the same in their ambition.

We all must be aware of this problem. Deep within all of us there is the hidden ambition to be a leader and to be above others. We do not like to be under anyone. Instead, we desire others to be under us. This thought in our fallen nature originated from Satan and is absolutely against the kingdom of God.

As He dealt with this situation, the Lord Jesus set up an excellent example for us. He told the mother that He was not authorized to give her sons such a position, that only the Father had the authority to decide where to place her two sons. Thus, the Lord Jesus Himself took a submissive position, thereby setting a proper example for all His disciples.

In the kingdom of the heavens there should be no ambition for position. In a sense, there is not even any position. The Lord Jesus said, "Whoever wants to become great among you shall be your servant, and whoever wants to be first among you shall be your slave" (Matt. 20:26-27). The Lord said that we should be not only servants but bondslaves, slaves sold to others. Then He presented Himself as an example, saying, "The Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve" (v. 28). After the Lord Jesus said this, every mouth was shut.

THE PHARISEES AND SCRIBES

Now we come to Matthew 23:8-12. In this chapter the Lord Jesus rebuked the scribes who knew the Bible so well and the Pharisees who were so religious, calling both of them hypocrites. He rebuked them eight times, saying, "Woe to you." Eight times the Lord Jesus called them hypocrites. In chapter 5 we have nine times of blessing; in chapter 23 we have eight times of woe. Before He rebuked the hypocrites, He told His disciples not to take the way of the Pharisees, who were always ambitious. They liked to have a position and were always presuming and assuming. His disciples should never be like that. The greatest among them must serve the others. Whoever exalts himself will be abased; whoever humbles himself will be exalted. The economy in the kingdom of the heavens is absolutely different from all the governments of the world. The economy of the kingdom differs even from our own mental economy. In the economy of the kingdom, to gain is to lose, and to lose is to gain; to be great is to be small; to be exalted means to be abased, and to be abased means to be exalted.

My burden is simply to show you that to be ambitious is satanic. Ambition is contrary to the economy of God's kingdom. In the church, by His mercy and by His life, we must reject every kind of ambition. Every ambitious thought, will, and desire has its source in Satan. Satan is the embodiment of all ambitions.

Let me tell you a story that illustrates the problem of ambition. When I first came to Shanghai in 1933, I met a brother who was very "hot" for the church. He was exceedingly active. I was a stranger and a newcomer to the church there, and he was very good and "hot" toward me. At times he was more than hot—he was boiling. Something that is too hot hurts people. You cannot wash your face with boiling water and not injure yourself. At that time, I was ignorant and thought, "This brother is such a good brother, so warm toward me." Later, I discovered that since the day he had come into the church in 1927, he had expected to be one of the elders. This ambition disqualified him from being an elder. I know this because Brother Nee eventually told me the whole story. Fifteen years later the ambition still remained. Although many new ones had been given some responsibility, this brother was left untouched. No one could touch him because the ambition was still there. Eventually, he left the Lord's recovery and started a meeting in his home, getting a traveling preacher to be the minister. His ambition frustrated him from enjoying the church life and kept him from bearing any responsibility.

As long as we have that kind of ambition within us, the Lord can do nothing with us. Eventually, we will be snared by Satan, the ambitious one. This is not a small thing. In our experience over the past years we have seen quite a number of cases like this. Some of the dear ones loved the Lord and had the ability and the intention of doing something for the Lord, but they were unable to do so because of their ambition. Ambition is terrible! We can never have ambitious ones in positions of leadership; they will damage the whole church life.

A KING COMING IN HUMILITY

We continue with Matthew 21:4-9. This passage seems to be unrelated to the matter of being ambitious and seeking greatness. Here the Lord Jesus was truly the King. Yet He was not ambitious. He had no ambition of being a king, but He was, in reality, the King. The kingdom was His, and the people were for Him. How then did He enter Jerusalem? Did He ride upon an excellent

Egyptian horse? No! He came as the unique King, riding upon a donkey, in genuine humility. He came as a king, but He came in the form and the appearance of humility. This is very good. How marvelous it would be if some of the dear ones among us would be very useful, very much anointed, and full of life, yet their form and appearance would be so humble. We should not have the attitude, "I am really anointed! I am very gifted, and I must have the highest position." We should never be like this. The Lord Jesus came as the King in a humble way. He did not ride on a horse or even on a grown donkey. He rode upon a baby donkey. Nearly everyone was for Him, yet He entered the city in a humble way.

Then the people spoke for Him. They took off their garments and spread them on the road. My concern is not to pass on the doctrinal knowledge of this portion of the Word but to point out its significance in life. We need to see the living significance. The significance of this instance of the Lord's walk is that, although He was King, He did not assume any form or appearance. He came as the real King in a humble way, and He did not speak a word for Himself. The people spoke for Him by casting their garments and palm branches on the road.

When the Pharisees saw this, they were jealous, but they pretended to be religious. Actually, they were not that religious; they were simply jealous of the Lord Jesus. They were bothered that a little Nazarene should receive such a celebration. Even the little children in the temple were crying and shouting, "Hosanna!" The Pharisees considered such crying to be out of order. Why was He allowing the children to shout and cry for Him in the temple? That is the place for people to worship God. They should come into the temple with reverence. Why did He not rebuke all these children? It seems that the Pharisees were quite religious. Actually, however, it was not a matter of being religious; it was a matter of jealousy.

Because they were being religious and scriptural, the Lord Jesus said to them, "Have you never read, 'Out of the mouth of infants and sucklings You have perfected praise'?" (v. 16). His response indicated that it was not wrong for the children to cry and to shout "Hosanna!" It is absolutely scriptural and fundamental. The same response can be made to the Christianity of today. Some people have come into our meetings and asked, "What kind of Christian service is this? With all the shouting, it is like a basketball game or a football game." But I would ask them, "Have you never read the verses in the Old

Testament about shouting and praising loudly?" (Ezra 3:10-11; Psa. 5:11; 95:1; 100:1).

THE CHIEF PRIESTS AND ELDERS

The chief priests and the elders then came to the Lord Jesus (Matt. 21:23-27). The chief priests held high positions in religion, and the elders held notable positions in the community. They asked the Lord, "Who gave You this authority?" (v. 23). This question shows the connection between this passage and the passages we have already covered. The underlying thought of ambition and authority connects these portions of Matthew, just as the washing of hands, the eating of crumbs, and the leaven connected those in chapters 15 and 16. The disciples were ambitious for authority and position, but the Lord Jesus conducted Himself in an unassuming way. Although He was the King, He did not assume the kingship. The opposers, the religious and community leaders, also had ambitious thoughts. "Who is this little man from Nazareth? Who gave Him this position and authority? We are the high priests and the elders. Who is He?"

Once again we see the wisdom of the Lord Jesus. When they asked Him concerning His authority, He asked them about the authority of John the Baptist. "I also will ask you one thing, which if you tell Me, I also will tell you by what authority I do these things. The baptism of John, from where did it come, from heaven or from men?" (vv. 24-25). The Lord Jesus, of course, knew everything. The priests should have known not to play with the Lord Jesus. When the Lord Jesus asked the priests and the elders about the baptism of John, they were caught in a corner.

The priests and elders realized that they had a problem. "They reasoned among themselves, saying, If we say, From heaven, He will say to us, Why then did you not believe him? But if we say, From men, we fear the crowd, for all hold John as a prophet" (vv. 25-26). They did not know what to do. Finally, they followed the father of lies and said, "We do not know." The Lord Jesus replied, "Neither do I tell you by what authority I do these things" (v. 27). He realized that they knew but were unwilling to tell Him. For them to say that they did not know was a lie. So the Lord said, "Neither do I tell you by what authority I do these things."

The Lord Jesus continued by telling a parable that offended them: “What do you think? A man had two children. And he came to his first son and said, Child, go today and work in the vineyard. And he answered and said, I do not want to; yet later he regretted and went. And he came to the other and said likewise. And he answered and said, I will, sir; yet he did not go. Which of the two did the will of the father? They said, The first. Jesus said to them, Truly I say to you that the tax collectors and the harlots are going into the kingdom of God before you” (vv. 28-31).

By this parable the Lord Jesus put the tax collectors and harlots above all the Pharisees. The Pharisees thought that they were on top and that the tax collectors and harlots were under their feet, but the Lord Jesus put the Pharisees on the bottom. John had come according to the way of righteousness, and when the tax collectors and harlots had heard his preaching, they changed their minds and repented. But the Pharisees did not repent, so the Lord ranked them below the tax collectors and harlots. Do you see the wisdom of the Lord Jesus in this parable? Once again we have the line of who is first, greater, or higher than others.

The Lord continued with another parable (vv. 33-45). He told them of a man who owned a vineyard and hired people to take care of it for him. At a certain time the owner sent his slaves to collect the fruit. The vinedressers killed the slaves, and when the householder sent other slaves, they also killed or beat them. Finally, the householder sent his own son, thinking that the vinedressers would surely respect him. However, in an attempt to seize the inheritance, they killed the heir. This parable was the Lord’s answer to the question concerning His authority. “What is My authority? My source? My position? My source is My Father. I am His Son. This is My position. My Father gave Me this authority.” According to the parable, the rebellious ones realized that the heir had come and were saying, “This is the heir. Come, let us kill him” (v. 38).

Then the Lord went on to say, “Have you never read in the Scriptures, The stone which the builders rejected, this has become the head of the corner...?” (v. 42). By this word the Lord showed them that He was the Son of God who had come to receive God’s inheritance. They would kill Him out of hatred, but afterward He would become the resurrected cornerstone for God’s building. This building would be with another people, and by this building, God’s kingdom would be taken from them and given to others. Those other people

would be the building of which He would be the cornerstone. The Lord continued, “This was from the Lord, and it is marvelous in our eyes” (v. 42). Then He said, “He who falls on this stone shall be broken to pieces” (v. 44). The Jewish people, the Jewish nation, and Judaism itself—all would fall upon Him and be broken. Also, “On whomever it falls, it shall crush him to powder and scatter him like chaff” (v. 44). Here we see three aspects of Christ as the stone. He is the chief cornerstone for the building of the church, but He is the stumbling stone to the Jewish people. All the Jewish people, including the Jewish nation and religion, fell upon Him and were broken. According to Daniel 2:34-35, He will be the stone from heaven that will fall upon the earthly nations and break them into pieces. To the church He is the chief cornerstone, to the unbelieving and rebellious Jews He became the stumbling stone, and to the Gentile world He will be the smiting stone.

The priests and the elders had questioned the Lord Jesus concerning His authority and origin. The Lord Jesus answered them in a very mysterious and offending way. The Pharisees realized that He was talking about them. Actually, the Lord Jesus was not talking about them. He was talking about Himself. He was revealing Himself as the Son of God, as the rejected and resurrected cornerstone for the building of the church, as the stumbling stone to the unbelieving Jews, and as the smiting stone to all the Gentile nations. He is the all-inclusive One. He is everything. He is for God, and He is for the church. He will deal with the Jews, and He will deal with the Gentile world. Only the Lord Jesus has the wisdom to speak such a word.

Do not be ambitious for a position, but be zealous for Christ. Christ is not only versus religion; He is also versus position. Forget about position, leadership, and greatness. We all must be zealous for Christ. Christ is my position. Christ is my greatness. Christ is everything to me. He is the Son of God, He is the Heir of God’s inheritance, and He is also the cornerstone that is rejected, resurrected, and chosen by God for His building. As the stone, He will be the judging stone to the unbelieving Jews and over all the Gentile nations. Christ is everything! So we must forget about ambition for position and be zealous for Christ.

CHAPTER THIRTY

CHRIST VERSUS RELIGION, POLITICS, DOCTRINES, AND LAW

Scripture Reading: Matt. 22:1-14, 15-22, 23-32, 34-40, 41-46

Matthew 22 continues the Lord's answer to the chief priests and elders who asked Him about His source and authority. He had already used two parables in answering them. In the first parable He exposed their unwillingness to repent that they might enter into the kingdom of God. In the second He revealed to them that He was the Son of God and that, after being rejected by them, in resurrection He would become the chief cornerstone for God's building, the stumbling stone to all the unbelieving Jews, and the smiting stone to all the Gentile nations at the time of His second coming.

In chapter 22 He spoke another parable in answer to the chief priests and the elders. This time He covered the ultimate point of what He is. This is the parable of the wedding feast. In the parable of the vineyard, the Lord Jesus did not use the term *the kingdom of the heavens has become like,* because strictly speaking, at the time of the parable of the vineyard, the kingdom of the heavens had not yet come. He said, "The kingdom of God shall be taken from you and shall be given to a nation producing its fruit" (21:43). Even in the parable of the two sons, which described the refusal of the priests and elders to repent, the Lord did not mention the kingdom of the heavens but the kingdom of God. "The tax collectors and the harlots are going into the kingdom of God before you" (v. 31). In those two parables the kingdom of the heavens had not yet come. The kingdom of the heavens begins with the parable of the wedding feast in chapter 22.

THE PARABLE OF THE WEDDING FEAST

The parable begins in this way: "The kingdom of the heavens has become like a king who prepared a wedding feast for his son" (v. 2). It is quite evident that the son here is Jesus Christ. As the Bridegroom, He is the center of the wedding feast. God has prepared a marriage feast, and Christ is its center. According to the parable, God sent forth slaves to invite people to the wedding

feast, meaning to invite them into the enjoyment of the kingdom. The first group of servants were those sent by the Lord Jesus—the twelve and the seventy (Luke 9:1-2; 10:1). After this, He was killed, and as the ox and the fatted calf, He was cooked and prepared for the wedding feast. After this killing and preparation, that is, after the Lord's crucifixion, resurrection, and ascension, and after Pentecost, another group of servants were sent to proclaim the kingdom and to invite people to come into the enjoyment of the kingdom. Peter and John were among this group of servants. Some of those who heard were preoccupied with fields and business and made light of the invitation, while others abused and killed His slaves. God was angered and sent His troops to destroy the city. According to history, this occurred around A.D. 70, when the Roman army under Titus destroyed Jerusalem and the temple, thus fulfilling the prophecy that "there shall by no means be left here a stone upon a stone, which shall not be thrown down" (24:2). The whole city of Jerusalem was destroyed. God then sent more servants to the crossroads. This means that God sent many servants to the Gentile world, to all the earth, inviting people to come into the enjoyment of the kingdom.

The center of this parable is Christ Himself. The elders and the priests had asked Him, "Who gave You this authority?" (21:23). Through the parable the Lord Jesus was saying that He is the center of the universe. He is the Bridegroom who has been designated by God the Father as the center of the universal wedding feast. He is not only the Son of God, the cornerstone, the stumbling stone, and the smiting stone, but He is also the Bridegroom at the universal wedding feast. He is the very center of God's economy. This is the central point of this parable and part of the answer to the question regarding His authority and source. The Lord is the Bridegroom. No one is more important at a wedding feast than the bridegroom. Even the father who prepared the wedding feast is not as important as the bridegroom. Christ as the Bridegroom is the center, the focus, of all God's economy. Thus, He has everything, including authority and position. We all must realize that Christ is the focus and center of God's economy for our enjoyment.

THE WEDDING GARMENT

We have been invited to the wedding feast. We have been called, and we did not reject that calling. However, although we have accepted the invitation and have come, this does not in itself mean that we are qualified to participate in the wedding feast. After being called, we need a wedding garment. What is

this wedding garment? In the Bible garments and clothing signify our righteousness. In some verses, such as Luke 15:22, garments signify Christ as our righteousness. However, in Matthew 22:11-12 and in Revelation 19:8, the wedding garment signifies the practical righteousnesses of the saints. According to Psalm 45, the queen who typifies the church has two garments. One signifies Christ Himself as our righteousness, and the other signifies our practical daily walk as our covering garment. We were clothed with Christ when we were saved. Christ as our righteousness qualifies us to be justified for salvation (1 Cor. 1:30). But after being saved and justified, we need to live out Christ as our practical righteousness. This is the overcoming life. When we were saved and justified, we put on Christ as our righteousness. Because we are covered by Christ as our righteousness, we are justified. Once we are justified, however, we need to live out Christ. We need to live by Christ in order that Christ can be lived out of us. Christ lived out of us will become our practical righteousness to cover us. This is the second aspect of righteousness, which is not necessary for salvation but which qualifies us to attend and participate in the wedding feast. The wedding feast refers to the millennium, the one-thousand-year reign with Christ (Rev. 20:4-6). Christ's wedding feast will not last twenty-four hours; it will last one thousand years. Only those who have a wedding garment will participate in that wedding feast.

To be saved we only need to have Christ as our righteousness covering us in the presence of God. Concerning this point we must be very clear. Christ is our righteousness by which we are justified. However, we should not think that all the problems are now solved. To be saved is one thing, but to be matured and saturated with Christ is another. We must go on to live by Christ, and not only to live by Him but to live Him out, to manifest Him. We need to express Christ by continually living by Christ. The very Christ whom we live out in this way will be our wedding garment, our practical righteousness. When we come to God for justification, we simply take Christ as our righteousness. However, at that point we have only received Christ; we have not yet experienced Him. In order to attend the wedding feast we need to experience the Christ whom we have received. Christ must become our experience. When Christ has become our experience, He will be the subjective, experiential righteousness that qualifies us to attend the wedding feast.

Matthew 22:14 says, "Many are called but few are chosen." Here we see again the two steps. To be called is one thing; to be chosen or selected is another. To be called means to be saved. Whether or not we are chosen, that

is, qualified for the wedding feast, is something pending. Christianity mostly preaches to people about being called but hardly mentions anything about the Lord's selection. But both Matthew 22:14 and Revelation 17:14 mention the matter of being called and of being chosen. I have no doubt that all of us are called. However, I have a real concern as to how many of the called ones will be selected. We have been called for salvation, but we must be selected for the wedding feast. For example, all the students in a school may graduate, but not everyone will receive a prize. This does not mean that if you do not receive a prize you do not graduate. You may graduate and yet not have a prize. Whether or not we participate in the one-thousand-year wedding feast on that wonderful, universal wedding day depends upon one thing: whether or not we live out Christ today.

Once again we see that Christ is the center. Many people claim to be Christ-centered, but I am afraid they may be Christ-centered in a very shallow way. We need to be Christ-centered in such a way that Christ will be not only our righteousness for us to be saved, but He will also be lived out in us as our subjective righteousness to qualify us for His wedding feast. We all need to realize Christ, and we all need to experience Christ. We should experience Christ to such an extent that He will become our wedding garment. Christ will then be our qualification, and the Father will recognize us as qualified for the wedding feast.

The parable of the wedding feast completes the answer to the question: "Who gave You this authority?" (Matt. 21:23). The Lord Jesus revealed much through these parables. In effect, He was saying, "I am the Son of God. I will be the resurrected cornerstone for God's building. I will also be the stumbling block to you unbelieving Jews and the smiting stone to the entire Gentile world. You must realize that I am the universal Bridegroom, the center of God's economy. You should not only receive Me but also live Me out. You need to experience Me to such an extent that I will become your subjective righteousness, which will qualify you to participate in the wedding feast."

THE PHARISEES AND THE HERODIANS

Although the Lord Jesus spoke in such a clear way, those foolish ones did not understand at all, and the Pharisees and the Herodians still tried to trap Him. The Pharisees were a religious party, and the Herodians were a political party. These two parties customarily fought against one another, but on this

occasion they cooperated in an attempt to entangle Christ (22:15-21). The answers of the Lord Jesus in the parables were centered and focused on Himself. However, the Pharisees and Herodians did not hear a word concerning Christ because they were preoccupied by their concepts and by their evil thoughts of persecution. They considered themselves very clever, so they conceived a plot to trap the Lord Jesus. They asked Him, "Tell us therefore, What do You think? Is it lawful to give tribute to Caesar, or not?" (v. 17). This was their strategy: if the Lord said yes, then the Pharisees would catch Him, but if He said no, the Herodians would catch Him. Either way, they thought, He would be caught. However, the Lord Jesus was wiser than these evil men and defeated their plan. The Pharisees and Herodians thought they were wiser than the Lord, but they did not know that He was their Creator and that they were simply His little creatures. The Lord Jesus said, "Show Me the coin for the tribute" (v. 19). They gave Him a coin, and as they did so, they lost their case. The Lord Jesus was very wise. He did not have the money; they did. Regardless of whether or not it is lawful to pay the tribute, as long as they had the money, it means they were the ones who had been caught. We are all familiar with the Lord's answer: "Render then the things that are Caesar's to Caesar and the things that are God's to God" (v. 21). Although they had worked so hard to trap Him, it was easy for the Lord Jesus to escape.

We must see that it is not a matter of religion or politics; it is altogether a matter of Christ. We must take care of Christ and not be preoccupied with our own concepts. If we are preoccupied with our concepts, we will not be able to receive Christ when He is presented to us. We need to be empty; Christ can then come into us.

THE SADDUCEES

Next to confront the Lord Jesus were the Sadducees, the ancient modernists, who raised a question concerning resurrection. They said that a man married a wife and died without having any children. According to Jewish custom and the law of Moses, the woman then married the man's brother (Deut. 25:5-6). He also died without having any children. The same thing happened to a total of seven brothers. So the Sadducees asked whose wife she would be in the resurrection. The Sadducees felt that they were smart, and they were confident that they had trapped Him. However, the Lord rebuked them by saying, "You err, not knowing the Scriptures nor the power of God. For in the resurrection they neither marry nor are given in marriage,

but are like angels in heaven" (Matt. 22:29-30). In that day there will be no husbands and no wives. "But concerning the resurrection of the dead, have you not read that which was spoken to you by God, saying, 'I am the God of Abraham and the God of Isaac and the God of Jacob'? He is not the God of the dead, but of the living" (vv. 31-32). Since He is the God of the living, surely Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob will be resurrected. If not, God would be the God of the dead. This answer fully shut their mouths. Who can defeat the Lord Jesus?

A LAWYER

Following this, a lawyer who was an expert in the law of Moses, assured that he could defeat the Lord Jesus, asked Him, "Teacher, which is the great commandment in the law?" (v. 36). To this the Lord Jesus answered clearly and simply, "'You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind'...And the second is like it: 'You shall love your neighbor as yourself'" (vv. 37, 39). At this answer the lawyer's mouth also was shut.

The Lord Jesus answered every question. He silenced the priests, the elders, the Pharisees, the Herodians, the Sadducees, and the lawyer. Then the Lord Jesus asked them a question: "What do you think concerning the Christ?" (v. 42). The Lord seemed to be saying, "You have questioned Me about religion, politics, fundamental beliefs, and the law. You have missed the mark. These are not the central point. The mark is Christ. What do you think about Christ? Tell Me, whose descendant is Christ?" They had some knowledge of the Scriptures and answered promptly that Christ is the son of David. The Lord acknowledged their answer as correct but then asked them, "How then does David in spirit call Him Lord?" (v. 43). In other words, how could the grandfather call the grandson "Lord"? Once again, every mouth was shut.

THE TWO NATURES OF CHRIST

Let us consider the same question. How could the grandfather call the grandson "Lord"? It is because Christ has two natures. On the one hand, Christ is the son of David, and on the other hand, He is the Lord of David. He is a human being, a man, and according to His human nature, He is the descendant of David, the son of David. However, the Lord Jesus is not so simple. He is wonderful! He is not only a human being; He is also a divine

being. He has the human nature, and He has the divine nature. He is a man, and He is God. As a man, He is the son of David. As God, He is the Lord of David. The poor Pharisees and Sadducees did not see that the Lord Jesus was such a wonderful person—both man and God. He is such a wonderful person, having humanity as well as divinity.

But even more of Christ is revealed in this portion of the Word. Christ is also presented as the resurrected, ascended, and coming One. Matthew 22:44, a quotation from Psalm 110, says, "The Lord said to my Lord, Sit at My right hand." For the Lord Jesus to sit at the right hand of God means that He has been resurrected and has ascended into the heavens. Then Psalm 110 continues by saying, "Until I put Your enemies underneath Your feet" (Matt. 22:44). This refers to His second coming. At the second coming of Christ, God will put all His enemies under His feet and make them His footstool. Here we see a wonderful Christ: He has humanity and divinity; He is the resurrected One, the ascended One, and the coming One. This Christ is the center of God's purpose and economy. However, many Christians are like those poor Jews who were discussing religion, politics, and the interpretation of the Bible. They take care of the secondary items and miss the central item, which is Christ. They miss the Christ who is man and God, the crucified One, the resurrected One, the One raised to the third heaven, the One sitting at the right hand of God, and the One who will return to subdue all His enemies. This Christ is the central item.

The Lord Jesus revealed Himself to His opposers, but none of them saw the vision because they were filled with their indignation against Him. They were entirely preoccupied with other things. They simply could not hear a word about Christ as the center. Today the situation is the same. I have met a good number of dear Christians who had become fully preoccupied with their own things and were quite disturbed concerning the Lord's recovery. When they talked with us, they could not receive even one word. They were absolutely confident that they were right and we were wrong. They did not offer the smallest space or the slightest opening to receive our word. We must see that in the kingdom of God there is no ground for religion, politics, or doctrine. In the kingdom every inch of the ground is for Christ. In the church, in the Lord's recovery, and in the reality of the kingdom, every inch is for Christ.

If we summarize all the points from the last chapter and from this chapter, we will see Christ with God's building. We also will see the vain and wasted

words of those who opposed the Lord Jesus. Christ is the Son of God, the chief cornerstone for the building of the church, the stumbling stone, and the smiting stone. To the church Christ is the cornerstone, to the unbelieving Jews He is the stumbling stone, and to the Gentile world He will be the smiting stone. He is also the Bridegroom, the center of the wedding feast. In addition, He is the very element of the wedding garment, which qualifies us to share in the wedding feast. We must experience such a Christ. He is both God and man. He has been crucified, has been resurrected, and has ascended to the right hand of God, where He is waiting until all His enemies are subdued. In all the local churches we simply need this Christ. In the local church Christ is the center, the hub, and the church is the rim. The Lord's recovery is Christ and the church. This is the kingdom. We do not want to hear anything about religion, politics, doctrines, or the interpretation of the Scriptures. We simply care for Christ.

CHAPTER THIRTY-ONE

CHRIST RESURRECTED, ASCENDED, AND REIGNING

Scripture Reading: Matt. 22:1-14, 15-22, 23-32, 34-40, 41-46

We need to remember that Matthew is a book in which the seeds of the kingdom are sown. In Matthew there is the kingdom and also Christ for the kingdom. There is the seed of the kingdom, and there is the seed of Christ. Many of the basic aspects of the kingdom were sown as seeds in the book of Matthew and developed in the following books of the New Testament. The seed is in Matthew, the sprouting is in Acts, the growth and blossoming are in the Epistles, and the maturity and harvest are in Revelation. It is exactly the same with Christ. The seed of Christ is sown in Matthew, sprouts in Acts, grows, blossoms, and brings forth fruit in the Epistles, and is fully developed and matured with the full harvest in the book of Revelation.

In nearly every chapter, the book of Matthew reveals some aspect of the kingdom, and it also presents Christ again and again from many different angles. We have seen that in chapter 1 Christ is Jehovah-plus and God-plus, Jehovah the Savior and God with us. In chapter 3 He is revealed as the Son of God who baptizes people into the Spirit of God. In chapter 4 He is revealed as the great light shining over the people who sit in darkness. By this shining, He spreads Himself into people, causing them to follow Him. In chapter 9 Christ is the feast, the Bridegroom, the new garment, the new wine, and the new wineskin. In chapter 11 He is our rest, and in chapter 12 He is the temple, the present David, the Lord of the Sabbath, the greater Jonah, and the greater Solomon. In chapter 16 He is revealed as the Son of the living God and as the Christ who will build His church. In chapter 17 Christ, the Son of God, is transfigured on the mountain, and God declares that this is His beloved Son, the only One we should hear.

THE TESTING OF THE LORD JESUS

After being revealed in such a way, the Lord Jesus entered Jerusalem for the last time to accomplish God's eternal purpose by being crucified. The Lord

Jesus knew what was before Him, so while He was traveling from Galilee to Jerusalem, He told His disciples at least three times that He was going to Jerusalem to be crucified and resurrected. In the type of the passover, the lamb had to be examined for several days before the actual passover feast (Exo. 12:3, 6). According to the Jewish way of reckoning, this period was six days. The Lord Jesus entered Jerusalem and, like the passover lamb, was examined by the people for several days preceding the passover. He was tested by the leaders of the people—the chief priests, the elders, the Pharisees, the Herodians, the Sadducees, and a lawyer. These tests came from at least four directions: from religion, politics, fundamental beliefs, and the law. As a result of this testing, the examiners themselves were exposed that they were distracted from Christ and occupied with worthless things. All of them missed the mark, and none of them saw Christ, the real treasure. They gave their complete attention to things other than Christ. All the people with high attainment, knowledge, and education surrounded the Lord Jesus and examined Him, presuming themselves to be wise. They did not realize how foolish they were. Not one of them was seeking the real treasure. Not one of them saw God's goal or economy. Not one of them perceived God's center and focus. They could only see what they themselves considered as valuable and important.

MISSING CHRIST

The situation is the same today. Christians pay attention to many things but neglect Christ. Although they think they are clever, they really do not know what they are doing. The men who tested the Lord Jesus completely missed the mark, but the Lord Jesus knew what He was doing. Although they missed the mark, He never gave up His goal. Even as He answered their foolish questions, He held on to the goal. This shows that the Lord Jesus will take advantage of any opportunity to reveal Himself. We may inquire foolishly, but the Lord will always answer wisely. Our question may be wrong, but the Lord's reply will contain something precious.

REVEALING CHRIST

As He answered all the people who were testing Him, the Lord Jesus revealed Himself in an all-inclusive way. However, it was in a mysterious and hidden way because He revealed Himself through parables. Consider the parable of the vineyard. In such a simple and hidden way the Lord Jesus

revealed Himself as the Son of God and as the Heir of God's universal inheritance. He also declared that He would be rejected and resurrected as the cornerstone for God's building. Anyone who falls upon Him will be broken. This is a great matter. If we had been there at the time with this vision, we would have realized the seriousness of His words. Those who tested the Lord Jesus were quite foolish. They did not realize the significance of what the Lord Jesus was saying.

This is the all-inclusive seed sown in Matthew. The Lord Jesus as the stone has three aspects: He is the cornerstone for the building of God, the church; He is the stumbling stone for the unbelieving Jews; and He is the smiting stone, which, at His return from the heavens, will fall upon all the nations and break them into pieces (Dan. 2:34-35). We need to see that the Lord Jesus is the stone in these three aspects. This seed is sown in Matthew and is developed throughout the remainder of the New Testament, where all three aspects sprout, blossom, and reach the full harvest. In Acts 4:11 Peter said that Christ is the stone rejected by the builders and raised up in resurrection to be the head of the corner. He repeated this in 1 Peter 2:6-8. In Ephesians 2:20 Paul also refers to Christ as the cornerstone. According to Romans 9:32-33, Paul says that Christ has become the stone of stumbling to the unbelieving Jews. The New Testament also develops the thought that Christ will smite the Gentile nations (Rev. 19:15). How marvelous that in such a brief parable the Lord Jesus revealed Himself in so many aspects! At least five points were mentioned: Christ is the Son of God, the Heir of God's inheritance, the cornerstone, the stumbling stone, and the smiting stone. What a rich revelation of Christ! The religious people asked Him, "Who gave You this authority?" The Lord Jesus answered that He was the Son of God, the Heir of God's inheritance, the cornerstone, the stumbling stone, and the smiting stone. What other authority did He need? No authority could be higher than this.

THE WEDDING FEAST

Christ is further revealed in the parable of the wedding feast. Strictly speaking, the kingdom is not a matter of labor; it is a matter of enjoyment. We know this because He is also the Bridegroom, the focus of God's pleasure, the very center of God's happiness and joy. During the ancient times a father would prepare a wedding feast for his son with great joy. No one could describe the father's joy as he prepared the wedding feast for his son. Our

heavenly Father also has such a joy as He prepares the wedding feast for His Son. Although His Son is the focus and center of the wedding feast, the most joyful One is the Father. This is the good pleasure of the Father. According to His good pleasure, the Father has prepared a wedding feast for His Son, who is the Bridegroom.

THE WEDDING GARMENT

When the glad tidings of this wedding feast were proclaimed, many people rejected them. A good number did respond, however, by accepting the invitation and coming to the wedding feast with joy and pleasure. Unfortunately, some of those who were called and came did not have a wedding garment. For the wedding feast, there is the need of a wedding garment. The wedding feast is Christ, and the wedding garment also is Christ. In the Bible there are these two aspects of Christ: on the one hand, He is our food; on the other hand, He is our clothing. Within He is our food, and without He is our garment.

This parable does not refer to the present enjoyment of Christ but to the future enjoyment of Christ at His coming back. The present enjoyment of Christ today is a foretaste, and the future enjoyment of Christ will be the full taste. The foretaste is for the full taste. If you do not enjoy the proper foretaste, it will be difficult for you to enjoy the full taste. Thus, we all need to feast upon Christ today in order to have the proper full taste in the future. When we eat Christ and feed upon Him, we will have the proper foretaste, and Christ will gradually saturate our inward being and will be lived out of us as our expression. This expression of Christ will become our wedding garment. The spreading of the Lord Jesus from within will eventually become our expression, our wedding garment, and will qualify us to enjoy the full taste at the wedding feast. If you lack the foretaste today, you will have neither the spreading of Christ within you nor the wedding garment to qualify you for the full taste at His coming back.

FEW ARE CHOSEN

According to this parable, “Many are called but few are chosen” (Matt. 22:14). What does this mean? All genuine Christians have been called. They have believed in the Lord Jesus. But, after being called, many have not enjoyed the Lord Jesus properly as the foretaste. The Lord Jesus has not

saturated them, taken full possession of them, and spread Himself into all the inward parts of their being. Neither has He been able to express Himself out of their being. Many of the called ones have never known this kind of enjoyment of Christ in their personal experience. Therefore, at the time of the full manifestation of the kingdom, they will lack a wedding garment and will not be qualified for the wedding feast. They will be unable to participate in the full taste of the enjoyment of Christ. This corresponds with what we have seen previously regarding Christ coming into us and spreading Himself into our being and expressing Himself out from our being. This expression of Christ will become our wedding garment.

You should not be foolish like the Pharisees. You must be keen and alert. You have been called, but you may not have constantly enjoyed Christ in an adequate way. Yet it is not too late if you begin immediately. You should start immediately to have the foretaste in a proper way, to experience Christ adequately by eating Him daily and allowing Him to spread throughout your being. Gradually, you will have a full expression of Christ, and that will be your wedding garment. When the time arrives, you will have the wedding garment for the wedding feast. To us, Christ is not only the building stone, He is also the wedding feast and the wedding garment. He is our center, our focus. As far as we are concerned, everything is focused on Christ as our enjoyment.

THE TREASURE—CHRIST

In Matthew these items of Christ are in seed form. We can see the blossoming in the Epistles and the harvest in Revelation. In answering the foolish questions of the religious people, the Lord Jesus spontaneously revealed Himself in a full way. Nevertheless, there is more. What has been revealed is insufficient; there is something more to be revealed about Christ. The mouths of all the inquirers were shut, and all the problems and questions were solved. Eventually, the Lord Jesus presented them the treasure by asking, “What do you think concerning the Christ? Whose son is He?” (v. 42). Forget about religion, politics, doctrines, and questions of the law. The question of questions is, “What do you think concerning the Christ?” When they answered that Christ is the son of David, the Lord then asked them, “How then does David in spirit call Him Lord?” (v. 43). We may ask the same question. It is because He is both the son of David and the Lord of David. Christ is man, and He is also God. He has both divinity and humanity. In His humanity He is the son of David; in His divinity He is the Lord of David.

In addition, by His simple and brief word in Matthew 22:44, the Lord sowed the seed of His ascension and coming victory over the enemy to set up His kingdom. “The Lord said to my Lord, Sit at My right hand until I put Your enemies underneath Your feet.” The words are simple and brief, yet the implication is vast and far-reaching. This statement implies that Christ will be resurrected, ascended, and set on the right hand of God. It also implies that Christ will return in victory over all His enemies to establish the kingdom of God. God will put His enemies underneath His feet. What a Christ! He is man, God, the resurrected One, the ascended One, the coming One, the victorious One, and the One who will set up God’s kingdom over His enemy. What a revelation of Christ! This is Christ as the all-inclusive seed.

Can you recall all the aspects that we have covered? Christ is the Son of God, the Heir of God, the building stone, the stumbling stone, the smiting stone, the feast, the wedding garment, man, God, the resurrected and ascended One, the coming and victorious One, and the One who will establish God’s kingdom on the earth over every enemy. This is the seed that is developed throughout the remainder of the New Testament until it reaches maturity in the book of Revelation.

We should not be like those Pharisees, Sadducees, and Herodians. We must be always keen and alert to apply Christ to our situation. “O Lord Jesus, You are the Son of God! You are the Heir of God! I take You as the building stone; I take You as the wedding feast and as the wedding garment. I take You as man and as God. I take You as the resurrected and ascended One. I take You as the coming One, the victorious One, and as the One who will set up God’s kingdom on the earth.” I hope that all the saints in the churches will concentrate on these matters. If you do so, you will be enlightened by Christ. You will be filled and saturated with Him. You will then have a new way of understanding the Bible. You will understand the Bible not as a mere book of stories or doctrines; you will take the Bible as a revelation of Christ with all His riches. Spend time on the aspects of Christ revealed in His answers to the religious people. Truly He is everything. Matthew is a book of the living Christ, a rich Christ, a practical Christ, a present Christ, and an experiential Christ. This Christ is our wedding feast and our wedding garment.

IN OUR SPIRIT

We can realize Him, apply Him, experience Him, and enjoy Him in our spirit. We all must be in our spirit. Have you seen the revelation of Christ? If so, turn to your spirit and call Him Lord. David in spirit called Him Lord. Please notice that the word *spirit* has a small letter *s*, denoting our human spirit. David called Him Lord in spirit, and this is what we also need to do today. We need to call Him Lord in our spirit. It makes a great difference. The first sentence of the Lord's teaching in the book of Matthew was concerning our spirit. "Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of the heavens" (5:3). We need to call Him Lord in our spirit. We need to be poor in spirit, and we also need to call Him Lord in our spirit.

CHAPTER THIRTY-TWO

THE REALITY OF THE KINGDOM (1)

Scripture Reading: Matt. 5:3-12, 13-16, 20-45a, 48

Matthew 5, 6, and 7 reveal the reality of the kingdom. According to Matthew, the kingdom has three main aspects: the reality of the kingdom, the appearance of the kingdom, and the manifestation of the kingdom. If we are going to understand all the chapters and verses in Matthew regarding the kingdom, we have to see these three main aspects of the kingdom. Some of the verses in Matthew are concerning the reality of the kingdom; others are concerning the appearance of the kingdom; still others are concerning the manifestation of the kingdom in the future.

We must realize that as the reality of the kingdom comes into being, the enemy, Satan, will also come in to do some distracting, frustrating, and damaging work. This working of the enemy produces the outward appearance of the kingdom. Today these two lines exist together: the reality of the kingdom and the appearance of the kingdom. In Matthew 13 there is the wheat, but there are also the tares. There is the great tree growing up out of proportion and not according to its kind, and there is the leaven corrupting the fine flour. The tares, the great tree, and the leaven constitute the outward appearance of the kingdom.

Eventually, there will be the harvest time, the full coming of the kingdom. That will be the manifestation of the kingdom. Do not consider that it is unnecessary to discern these three aspects concerning the kingdom. If you do not see these three aspects, you cannot understand what Matthew says concerning the kingdom. This is the very reason why many Christians have never been clear concerning the kingdom in Matthew. They simply have never seen the three different aspects of the kingdom. The reality of the kingdom is fully revealed and covered in Matthew 5, 6, and 7. These chapters have been called the Sermon on the Mount. The Lord Jesus called His disciples and brought them to the mountaintop, where He gave them the discourse that is recorded in Matthew 5, 6, and 7. It is not easy to realize and apprehend what is revealed in these three chapters. In the past, these three chapters have not been realized in a full, adequate, and proper way. Although they may have

used some of the sentences, phrases, and terms from these chapters, most Christians have not apprehended them in a proper way. These chapters are the revelation of the proper kingdom life, and some of the verses are very deep. If you do not realize the governing principle, it will be difficult for you to apprehend the real meaning of these verses.

The Lord's discourse on the mount is divided into seven sections that reveal seven aspects of the life of the children of the kingdom.

THE CHARACTER OF THE CHILDREN OF THE KINGDOM

The character or nature of the kingdom people is revealed in Matthew 5:1-12. We may also say that this is the element or substance or essence of the children of the kingdom. I prefer to use *character* because it is not just a matter of essence or element. There is something substantial being expressed. *Character* means something more than mere nature. It means something of the nature that comes out and is expressed. The character of the children of the kingdom is under the ruling of the heavens. It is not under any earthly ruling. It is not under the ruling of the family, of the school, of the police station, or of the law court; nor is it under the ruling of anything else in the community. It is under the ruling of the heavens. The kingdom of the heavens really means the ruling of the heavens.

We must realize that from the time man fell, he began to be under an earthly ruling. After his fall man started to lose God's rule from the heavens. Today all the worldly people, regardless of their status, regardless of their standards, and regardless of whether they are good or bad, are under a kind of earthly ruling. They are ruled either by their family, by their school, by their corporation, or by their municipal government. This is the earthly ruling.

But the time came for God to establish His kingdom on the earth. His kingdom is another category of ruling, which belongs to the heavens. Although it is on the earth, its ruling is from the heavens, so it is called the kingdom of the heavens. The ruling on the earth comes from the heavens where God dwells. It is not just the kingdom of God in a general way but the kingdom of the heavens in a specific way. The heavens have come down to rule over the earth. Under this kind of ruling, we who are the children of the kingdom have a specific nature and character. Our character, our essence, our element, and our nature with all its expression are altogether different from

the people who are under the worldly, earthly ruling. The children of the kingdom have their own unique character and nature.

The character of the kingdom people under the ruling of the heavens is composed mainly of six inward conditions related to their heart and spirit and also to three outward items. Altogether there are nine items. Therefore, the Lord repeated the words *blessed are* nine times. The six items of the inward condition begin with the first condition in the spirit and end with the sixth condition in the heart. This means that if we want to realize the proper kingdom life, we need a proper spirit and a proper heart. We need to know our spirit and to know our heart. We need to adjust and to attune both our spirit and our heart.

Poor in Spirit

The first item of the inward condition is in Matthew 5:3: "Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of the heavens." The first basic condition is related to our spirit, which is the very place where God can dwell. Our spirit is the organ within us created by God for us to contact Him, to take Him in, to receive Him, and to contain Him. Many Christians have missed this first condition. They miss the first organ for the kingdom life—the human spirit. Many Christians have never heard anything concerning the human spirit. This is poor and pitiful! To teach people to contact God without using their spirit is like trying to train people to run without using their feet.

To be poor in our spirit means to empty all the things other than God out of our spirit. We all have to empty our spirit. Our spirit is only for God. This means that we have to empty out everything else that may be within our spirit. We need to be empty in our spirit for God. Unfortunately, most of us have something other than God filling our spirit. Do not think that your knowledge remains only in your mind. Through your mind, your knowledge can enter into your spirit and occupy it. Do not think that your hatred remains only in your heart. The hatred can also enter into your spirit and occupy it. Do not think your human, natural, fleshly love remains only in your emotion. It too can get into your spirit and occupy it. Then your spirit will be filled up with knowledge, hatred, or love. Once your spirit is filled up, there is no room left for God.

When the kingdom comes, we need to be empty and poor in our spirit so that we can take God into us. This, however, does not mean to have a poor spirit. Do not have a poor spirit, but be poor in your spirit. This means to have nothing in your spirit except God. When the Pharisees, Sadducees, scribes, and chief priests came to the Lord Jesus, they were all filled up in their spirit with all kinds of junk, which they regarded as treasures. Their traditions, their religion, their rituals, their scriptural knowledge, their forms, and all their old religious Jewish practices had become so much junk filling up their spirit. Furthermore, their concepts and philosophical reasonings were filling up and occupying their spirit. They were completely filled up with all these things. When they came to the Lord Jesus, they argued with Him because they were not poor in spirit. Therefore, in the opening word of His discourse on the mountain, the Lord said, "Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of the heavens." If we are poor in our spirit, God can immediately come into us. We will then be in the kingdom of the heavens. This is the first condition of our inward parts. Our spirit has to be emptied. Do not keep any knowledge, tradition, form, religion, or anything else other than God in your spirit. Let your spirit be emptied of other things, and be absolutely and fully for God. This is what we need. Do not allow all the knowledge and the things you received from Christianity to occupy your spirit. They need to be emptied out. They may seem to be quite good, but compared to the Lord Jesus they are dung. In Philippians 3 Paul says that he counted all his previous attainments and knowledge as dung or refuse. He counted all things to be loss on account of the excellency of the knowledge of Christ Jesus his Lord. Let us also be empty and poor in spirit on account of Christ.

Mourning

If we are poor in spirit, surely we will mourn. We will feel sad and sorrowful for the poor situation among God's people and even for our own condition. The situation among God's people today is really worthy of mourning. Peter, John, and the other apostles surely needed to mourn because of the poor situation among the Pharisees and Judaizers. For the kingdom life we also need to mourn. We need to mourn concerning ourselves, our society, and today's Christianity. When we look at Christ, we are happy and rejoicing, but when we look at ourselves and others around us, we have to mourn. Sometimes in my room I have been rejoicing with the Lord, but at other times I have been mourning for the fundamental, Pentecostal, and charismatic Christians. By reading the Christian papers you can see that the situation is

pitiful. If you look at the Lord and the church, it is really wonderful. But outside of the church, in formal Christianity, fundamental Christianity, Pentecostal Christianity, and even charismatic Christianity, it is a poor situation. So we have to mourn. This is the second of the inward conditions.

Meek

Matthew 5:5 says, "Blessed are the meek, for they shall inherit the earth." If we are sorrowful and mourning, we will surely be meek. We will not be proud but meek. We will be willing to suffer and even happy to lose something. To be meek not only means to be humble and lowly but also to be willing to suffer and to lose something. If we are willing to suffer and are happy to lose something, we will receive a reward—the inheritance of the earth. When the manifestation of the kingdom comes, some will inherit the earth. According to Luke 19, some will inherit ten cities and others five cities. We must be the meek people. We must be poor in spirit, we must mourn for the present situation, and then we must be meek, humble, lowly, willing to suffer, and happy to lose something.

Hungry and Thirsty for Righteousness

We should not only seek for righteousness but should be hungry and thirsty for righteousness. We must be anxious and desirous to be right with God and to be right with man according to God. We must be right, not merely according to man's regulations and man's principles, nor according to man's hopes and expectations, nor according to our own concepts and philosophy, but according to God. To have righteousness is to be right with God and right with man according to God. We have to be hungry and thirsty for such a righteousness. This relates to our motives. In our spirit and in our heart, in our inward being, we have to be right with God and right with others according to God.

Merciful

Matthew 5:7 says, "Blessed are the merciful, for they shall be shown mercy." To be right or to seek and hunger for righteousness means to be strict with ourselves. But to be merciful is to be lenient toward others. We may be right with God and right with other people according to God. But perhaps others are not right. Rather, they are very loose. Should we condemn them? No, we

must have mercy upon them. If we will show mercy toward others, we will receive mercy from God. But if we are strict toward others, God will also be strict with us. We must learn to be strict with ourselves but kind toward others. We should never measure others by ourselves as a standard. We should not require others to be according to our standard. If we do this, it means we have no mercy; instead, we are legal. Let us learn to be strict, demanding much of ourselves, but kind toward others without demanding anything. This is what it means to be merciful.

Pure in Heart

Verse 8 says, “Blessed are the pure in heart, for they shall see God.” If our heart is pure, we will see God. Our motives, intentions, desires, and purposes must come out of a pure heart. To have a pure heart means that our heart is single, seeking nothing but the Lord Himself.

These six inward conditions begin with our spirit and end with our heart. This means we all must learn to attune our spirit and our heart. We all need to pray, “Lord, adjust me. Grant me a proper spirit and a proper heart. Otherwise, I can never have the proper kingdom life.”

Making Peace

When we have the proper inward condition toward the Lord, something will spontaneously come out as the outward state. The first item which will come out is that of making peace. We will be peacemakers, and we will be called sons of God. This is because the Son of God, Jesus Christ, is the One who makes peace. He is the real Peacemaker, and we are the sons of God. If we are those who are poor in spirit, mourning, meek, hungry and thirsty for righteousness, merciful toward others, and pure in heart, surely we will be peacemakers. Do you think such a person could fight with others? Surely such a one will be peaceful and also a peacemaker.

Persecuted for Righteousness

If you exercise to keep yourself right with God and right with others according to God, you will be persecuted. Others will not appreciate you, and they will persecute you. You will suffer for seeking after righteousness. This is the second outward state of the character of the children of the kingdom.

Persecuted for Christ

The third outward state is that you will be persecuted for Christ. People will revile you and say evil things about you because of Christ. Paul the apostle suffered from evil reports (2 Cor. 6:8). We also have received some evil reports. Many times people have reviled us, spreading rumors and lies. This is to suffer for Jesus Christ. It may be that because you have turned to the Lord's recovery, some of your relatives and friends have spoken evil concerning you. Even if they know nothing evil about you, they may create some rumors according to their imagination. Then you will have an evil report. The Lord Jesus said that when this happens, we need to rejoice because our reward in the heavens is great.

These are the items of the character of the children of the kingdom. They are poor in spirit, mourning, meek, hungry and thirsty for the Lord's righteousness, merciful toward others, pure in heart, always making peace, suffering persecution for the sake of righteousness, and suffering persecution for Christ's sake. This must be our character. We must be this kind of people.

THE INFLUENCE OF THE CHILDREN OF THE KINGDOM UPON THE WORLD

If we have such a character, we will surely exert an influence upon the world. The Lord Jesus said that we are the salt of the earth and the light of the world. The earth is rotten and corrupted, and the world is darkened. Today the earth is corrupted with a spiritual chemistry, so it needs to be salted. Salt will kill the corruption of the earth. The Lord will put us into this corrupted compound as the salt to kill the germs and corruption. The world, the human community, is full of darkness. We are here as the light of the world to enlighten the world and to rule out the darkness. However, we must have the proper kind of character that can constitute us as salt and light. Otherwise, we will be a part of the corrupted earth and the darkened world. We ourselves will be corruption and darkness rather than salt and light. We believe the Lord is going to make all the local churches full of salt and light.

THE LAW OF THE CHILDREN OF THE KINGDOM

After Matthew covers the character and the influence of the children of the kingdom, he covers the law of the children of the kingdom. The children of

the kingdom are not under the written law, the law of Moses in the Old Testament, but under the restriction of the law of life. We know this because at the end of this section of the Lord's discourse, He said that we are children of the Father. As children, we have the Father's life. In 5:48 the Lord said that we should be perfect as our heavenly Father is perfect. The only way for us to be perfect as the Father is perfect is to have the Father's life. Otherwise, we can never be perfect as the Father is perfect. Most sons are like their fathers because they have their father's life. In this section there is a contrast of comparison between living under the law of Moses and living under the law of life.

Surpassing Righteousness

The Lord Jesus said that if we would enter into the kingdom, we need to have the righteousness that surpasses the righteousness which the Pharisees had by the law of Moses. The law of Moses said that we should not kill people. But the law of the kingdom of the heavens says that we should be reconciled with others. To be reconciled with others and to be agreeable with others is higher than not killing. It surpasses not killing.

Inward Pureness

Inward pureness surpasses the law against committing adultery. To commit adultery is something outward, but the law of life requires an inward pureness. Moses' law required a person not to commit adultery, but the law of life requires pureness in the heart. The inward standard of life is much higher than the outward standard of Moses. It surpasses the law of Moses.

Not Swearing

Not to swear surpasses not swearing falsely (vv. 33-37). To swear falsely is to neglect to fulfill what you have promised and sworn to do. It means not to keep your oath. Therefore, the Old Testament said not to swear falsely (Lev. 19:12; Num. 30:2). This means do not neglect to do what you have said. You must do whatever you have sworn to do. But the new law of life requires you not to swear at all. There is no need to swear because there is no need to prove that you are right. If you are right, you are simply right. You have no need to prove it. If the answer is yes, simply say yes; if no, simply say no. There is no

need to swear about it. To say more is of the evil one (Matt. 5:37). Not to swear at all is much higher than not swearing falsely.

Not Resisting an Evil Person

The law of life, which says "not to resist him who is evil" (v. 39), surpasses Moses' law of an eye for an eye and a tooth for a tooth. According to Moses' law, if someone breaks out your tooth, you in turn may break out his tooth (Exo. 21:24; Lev. 24:20; Deut. 19:21). But the law of life says not to resist (Matt. 5:39). If someone smites your right cheek, you should turn to him also the left cheek. If someone forces you to walk with him one mile, you should go with him two miles joyfully. If someone takes away your outer garment, you should give him your inner garment. This is much higher than the Old Testament law. It is the surpassing righteousness.

Loving Your Enemy

Loving your enemy surely surpasses loving your neighbor. The law of Moses required you to love your neighbor (Lev. 19:18), but the law of life requires you to love your enemy (Matt. 5:44). Again, this is much higher and far surpasses the law given by Moses.

Eventually, this section of the Lord's discourse ends by telling us that as children of the Father we must be perfect as the Father. We can have perfection only by the Father's life. We can have a surpassing righteousness only because we have a surpassing life within us. Because we have a surpassing life with a surpassing law, we can have a surpassing righteousness. The people of the kingdom are marvelous people! Their character, their influence, and their righteousness are marvelous! This should be the life of the local churches.

CHAPTER THIRTY-THREE

THE REALITY OF THE KINGDOM (2)

Scripture Reading: Matt. 6:1-34

All the aspects of the reality of the kingdom mentioned in Matthew 5 are related to life. Our natural life simply cannot produce the six items of the inward condition and the three items of the outward state. By our natural birth we are dust, not salt. We become salt only by regeneration. Once our nature is changed, our character is also changed. We become salt instead of dust because we have a new life. We have a new nature, a new element, and a new character by which we are the salt of the earth.

In addition, by the new life we are also the light of the world. John 1:4 says, "In Him was life, and the life was the light of men." We are the light because we have the life. If we did not have the divine life, we could never be the light. We are the light of the world because we have received the divine life. The life is the light. To say that we are the light of the world means that we have the divine life.

When we read that the kingdom of the heavens requires surpassing righteousness, perhaps our thought is, "Who can do this?" However, at the end of Matthew 5 we are told that we are the sons of our Father. This means we have the Father's life and nature. We are not adopted sons; we are sons born of the Father. Therefore, we have His life and nature (2 Pet. 1:4). There is perfection in His life, and we have His life. Our primary responsibility is to give the Father's life every opportunity to develop within us. The developing will be the perfecting. If we allow the life within to be developed, eventually the development of this life will be our perfection. It is not a matter of our doing.

When I was in Christianity as a youth, I heard many sermons that quoted verses from Matthew 5. In every case they applied this chapter to the improvement of human behavior. But the requirements of the kingdom cannot be met by improved behavior. No matter how much we improve ourselves, we are still dust and not salt. We can be salt only by receiving the life, nature, essence, and substance of God. When God's divine life comes into

us at the time of regeneration, we are transformed from dust into salt. Also, when we receive God's life, we become the light of the world.

In Matthew 5:20 the Lord Jesus mentioned the surpassing righteousness as a requirement for entering into the kingdom of the heavens. "Unless your righteousness surpasses that of the scribes and Pharisees, you shall by no means enter into the kingdom of the heavens." This qualification of excelling righteousness is also the wedding garment mentioned in 22:11-14 and Revelation 19:8. According to Revelation 19, the bride will be clothed in fine linen, which is the righteousnesses of the saints. Three portions of the Word—Matthew 5:20; 22:11-12; and Revelation 19:8—all indicate one thing: in order for us to enter into the wedding feast during the millennial kingdom, we need the surpassing righteousness. As we have already seen, this righteousness comes out of our enjoyment of Christ. When we received the Lord Jesus, He came into us and became our enjoyment. As we eat Him and enjoy Him day by day, He will have the opportunity to spread into our being and transform us. By this, Christ will be matured within us. This spreading and maturing of Christ within us will become the surpassing righteousness, the wedding garment, required for attending the wedding feast. To receive Christ into us qualifies us for salvation; to have Christ matured within us qualifies us for the wedding feast.

This corresponds to the concept of the kingdom that we have been emphasizing throughout this book. What is the kingdom? It is simply the Lord Jesus coming into us and being matured in us until the kingdom comes in full. If we would not allow Him to mature within us, how can we be in the full coming of the kingdom? Christ is the seed of the kingdom. Although He has entered into us as the seed, He needs to grow in us and mature in us. If we give Him the opportunity to mature within us, we will certainly participate in the harvest, the full coming of the kingdom. The maturity of Christ within us is the surpassing righteousness and will also be the wedding garment qualifying us to attend the wedding feast. Receiving Christ into us qualifies us for salvation; allowing Christ to mature in us qualifies us for the wedding feast.

THE PURITY OF THE CHILDREN OF THE KINGDOM

Now we come to Matthew 6, where we find the fourth aspect of the reality of the kingdom—the purity of the children of the kingdom in their good deeds.

The children of the kingdom do good deeds, and in their deeds there is no mixture, falsehood, hypocrisy, or pretension. Rather, there is purity, singleness, and simplicity. In the kingdom life there is nothing pretentious, nothing false, and nothing hypocritical.

Here again we see the wisdom of the Lord Jesus. The purity of the children of the kingdom operates in three directions: toward others in the giving of alms, toward God in prayer, and toward ourselves in fasting. Concerning others, we need to give alms to take care of their needs. Concerning God, we need to pray, not for our interests and affairs, but, "Your kingdom come; Your will be done, as in heaven, so also on earth" (v. 10). This prayer is for God. In principle, the prayer of the children of the kingdom should be something for God, to God, and with God. Concerning fasting, we must deal with the self. Fasting is not related to sins or sinful things but to lawful things. It is lawful for us to eat and drink. These are our rights. Everyone who is born has the right to eat and drink. When we fast, we deal with ourselves by renouncing our rights. This does not mean we deal with ourselves because we are wrong, worldly, sinful, or fleshly. No! We simply want to be dealt with by sacrificing our rights. Toward others we give alms, toward God we pray, and toward ourselves we fast. These are the three categories of the good deeds of the children of the kingdom.

When we do these things, we need to be pure and sincere, not hypocritical. What is hypocrisy? The word *hypocrite* comes from the Greek word that means an actor who is assuming another character. According to the ancient custom among both the Greeks and the Romans, stage actors spoke through a large mask in order to increase the force of their voice. So hypocrisy is an outward falseness. It indicates something exaggerated and unreal. It also implies to propagate with publicity. Both in the world and also in Christianity, nearly all the money is raised in the way of propagation.

When I was in a certain city, the brothers who lived there told me about the way a so-called church took to raise money. They would call a general meeting and present the need to the congregation. They would then ask for whoever could afford to give the largest amount to stand. The rich members, grasping an opportunity to display their wealth and generosity, would stand and offer a large amount of money. This method was very successful because it suited the fallen human nature.

In Matthew 6:3 the Lord said that when we give alms, we should not let our left hand know what our right hand is doing. This means we need to give in a secret way. This is absolutely contrary to the practice of Christianity. Some Christian groups even print reports showing the names of those who contributed the "love offerings." In the years of 1933 and 1934, the church in Shanghai, the largest church in the Lord's recovery in China, needed land on which to construct a meeting hall to seat five hundred people. At that time land was very expensive, and it was difficult to afford an adequate lot. The church needed property and prayed for it. In 1936 an elderly sister who was quite rich had some property very close to the meeting hall. This sister loved the Lord and attended most of the meetings. When she learned of the church's need for such a piece of property, she had the desire to offer that land to the church. At the same time, however, she was concerned for some of her children. Eventually, she decided to offer the property to the church for one-half of its value, which was between $25,000 and $30,000. Thus, the transaction was completed with the church paying half this amount, and the title deed being transferred to the church. While the plans were being drawn for the hall, that sister's daughter asked the church to include in the proposed meeting hall a stone with an inscription saying that the property for the building had been presented by the elderly sister for one-half its value. Brother Watchmen Nee absolutely refused to agree to this, and quite a negotiation followed. Brother Nee did not give one inch. He would never surrender an inch to such a show of human glory. The daughter of that elderly sister likewise would not budge an inch. Eventually, the deal was cancelled, with the title deed being returned to the family and the money being returned to the church. From 1936 until 1948, the church in Shanghai was not able to acquire a piece of land for a building. This caused the church to suffer. However, it was worthwhile for the church to suffer in this manner in order to keep the principle of the reality of the kingdom life in the matter of giving.

By relating to you this incident from our past history, you can see where we stand, and you can see the reality of the kingdom life in the matter of giving. Never make a display of your giving. This is why we do not like to reveal the amount of money people have offered to the church. In some of the cathedrals and church buildings, there are inscriptions indicating who donated certain objects. For example, a bench may have an inscription declaring who contributed it. This is a shame! If it were not for the American system of taxation, which allows for tax deductions on contributions, we would not

permit the offerers to make their names known in any way. In all the years in China, where there was a different method of taxation, we did not allow the saints to use personal checks for the offering. Everyone used currency. Thus, no one knew where the offerings came from. This is a good practice because it closes the door to the flesh and human vainglory.

The children of the kingdom must also have an inward purity concerning prayer. Sometimes you may be tempted to want others to hear when you are praying. It is wonderful to shout, "O Lord Jesus! Jesus is Lord!" However, do not intend for others to know that you are praying. In a sense, it is better to hide your praying from others. Never make a display of your prayer life.

Concerning fasting, the Lord Jesus said that the Pharisees and hypocrites disfigured their faces when they fasted as if to say, "Look at me. I'm fasting." The Lord Jesus said, "When you fast, anoint your head and wash you face, so that you may not appear to men to be fasting" (vv. 17-18). Whether in the giving of alms, in prayer, or in fasting, you should never make a show of your good deeds.

THE ATTITUDE OF THE CHILDREN OF THE KINGDOM TOWARD RICHES

Not Storing Up Riches

We continue with the fifth aspect of the reality of the kingdom—the attitude of the children of the kingdom of the heavens toward mammon, or riches (vv. 19-23). What should be the attitude of the children of the kingdom toward riches? First of all, we should not store up for ourselves treasures upon the earth (vv. 19-21). You may ask, "Are not savings accounts the storing up of treasures on earth?" It depends on your motive. There is nothing wrong with making some preparation for next year or for your children's education. In fact, in the Epistles we are told that parents should store up something for their children (2 Cor. 12:14). We must educate them in a proper way, and this will be expensive. As parents, we are responsible to care for our children. This is not a matter of outward regulations. We all need to pray concerning these things. The Lord's wisdom will then be with us, and we will be clear how much we should save for the future and for our children. If we are faithful to the Lord, He will show us what to do. The basic matter is to check our motive. The governing principle is that to store up treasures on earth is against God's

economy and expresses a kind of unbelief in His mercy and care. May the Lord's wisdom be with us in this matter.

Not Serving Riches

The second aspect of the children of the kingdom toward riches is not to serve both riches and God (Matt. 6:24). Although we may have a savings account, we must not serve it as we would serve God. God, not money or riches, is the only master whom we should serve. We should serve God and nothing else.

Trusting Our Father for Our Living

The third point is that we are trusting our Father for our living. The children of the kingdom trust in their Father for their living even as the birds of the heaven and lilies of the field do (vv. 25-31). The Lord Jesus was wise. He used the birds to illustrate the Lord's care for our eating and the lilies to illustrate the Lord's care for our clothing. The Lord Jesus said, "Look at the birds of heaven. They do not sow nor reap nor gather into barns, yet your heavenly Father nourishes them" (v. 26). They have no field or barn, but so many servants are serving them. All the rich people serve the birds in the air. The birds enjoy what the rich people do for them. The rich people have a few barns, but the birds have many barns.

The Lord continued by saying, "Consider well the lilies of the field, how they grow. They do not toil, neither do they spin thread. But I tell you that not even Solomon in all his glory was clothed like one of these" (vv. 28-29). Who gave the lilies this clothing? God did. We should be like the birds of heaven and the lilies of the field, trusting our Father in the heavens to take care of us.

Some who are loose and lazy may find this suitable to their natural concept. They may say, "This is wonderful! There is no need for us to work. God will feed and clothe us. We are like the birds of heaven. There is no need for us to do anything. God will take care of us." However, if they take this attitude, God will not take care of them. Never forget that there are some following verses. Matthew 6:33 says, "But seek first His kingdom and His righteousness, and all these things will be added to you." We must seek the kingdom. We should not be loose or lazy. When we seek first the kingdom of God and the

righteousness of God, He will certainly take care of us. However, we must not be loose but serious in seeking God's kingdom and righteousness.

CHRIST BEING THE KINGDOM

We have seen that *the kingdom of God* is simply another term for Christ. To seek the kingdom means to seek Christ. In the book of Philippians we do not have such a term as *the kingdom,* but we do find a synonymous term—*Christ.* To seek the kingdom first actually means to seek Christ first. Moreover, we should not seek Christ in a superficial or general way but in the way of the kingdom life. What is the kingdom life? From the very beginning of the Bible, we see that with God's kingdom there are two aspects—image and dominion. God created man in His own image and gave man dominion over all things (Gen. 1:26-28). We have to see that *image* relates to the expression of God and *dominion* relates to the authority of God. In order for us to express God's image, we need God's authority. This is the kingdom. Christ is God's kingdom. With Christ we have both the image of God and the authority of God. If we mean business with Christ, He will be our expression and authority. When we have Christ, we have the kingdom. If we seek Christ first, God will take care of our needs. It is not a matter of giving up things and losing things; it is a matter of taking up Christ. People may ask us why we do not practice certain things. The best answer is to tell them we do not have time for such things. We are fully occupied. Also, we do not have any room. We do not have the space for anything else. As far as time and space are concerned, we are fully occupied with Christ. This should be our attitude.

As children of the kingdom, we should be pure in all our good deeds. Our attitude toward mammon, or riches, is that we do not serve it as we serve God and that we do not put our trust in it. Our trust is in our Father. He takes care of our needs. We need to concern ourselves with His kingdom and His righteousness. Both the kingdom and the righteousness are Christ Himself in a very experiential way. By Christ we are right with God, and we are right with others according to God. We need to experience Christ as our practical righteousness in being right with God and right with others according to God. This is Christ expressed through us. Christ is the kingdom, and Christ is righteousness. If we seek Christ as the kingdom and as righteousness, our Father in heaven will take care of our needs. Whatever we need will be added to us. This is marvelous! This is the reality of the kingdom life.

CHAPTER THIRTY-FOUR

THE REALITY OF THE KINGDOM (3)

Scripture Reading: Matt. 7:1-27; 12:36; 19:23-26

We have considered five aspects of the reality of the kingdom life: the character of the children of the kingdom, the influence of the children of the kingdom, the righteousness of the children of the kingdom, the purity of the children of the kingdom in their good deeds, and the attitude of the children of the kingdom toward mammon or riches. Now we come to the sixth aspect—the principle of the children of the kingdom toward others. This is the principle of how we deal with people and treat people.

THE PRINCIPLES OF THE CHILDREN OF THE KINGDOM IN DEALING WITH OTHERS

Not Judging Others

The Lord's words in Matthew 7:1-12 are very clear. In order to have a proper relationship with others, we must observe one principle: never judge others. Judging includes criticizing and gossiping. Even talking about a person is judging him. It is very easy for believers as well as unbelievers to gossip. We simply like to know things about others and to talk about others. To avoid this, it is better not to know things about the saints. When I am invited into the homes of the brothers and sisters, I like to stay in the living room. I do not like to go into the kitchen or into the other rooms of the house. I like to be confined to the living room. Why? Because the more I see in a brother's house, the more I know about him, and the more material I have for gossiping. The best way to prevent gossip is to stop collecting material. If you want to extinguish a fire, the best way is to remove all the fuel. When there is no fuel, nothing can burn.

However, I have discovered a sorrowful and shameful thing: many of the dear saints are fond of knowing things about others. Once they go into another saint's home, they do their best to look into every room and even every corner. In this respect, there is no difference between Orientals and Westerners. Both are exactly the same, for we are all descendants of Adam.

Our “feathers” are the same color. We all want to know things about other people. When we are invited into a home, we want to know what is in all the rooms. Although it is very difficult for some saints to recall how many chapters there are in the book of Matthew, it is easy for them to remember the things they saw in someone’s room.

As a contrast to this, let me tell you of a brother, an eye specialist, in Shanghai, who had learned the lesson of life. When he knocked on a door, he would not enter, even if the door was open, until he was given permission. Once he had been invited in, he would not be seated until he was asked; and then he would not take any seat, but only the seat that was offered to him. Furthermore, he felt he had no right to look at things, pick up books, or go into the other rooms. Some of the saints, however, feel free to pick up books and open the drawers, the cupboards, and even the refrigerator. They seem to be the lord of that home. They assume the right to look into everything, to investigate, and to collect material for gossiping. You must be clear that the more you know about others, the more you will gossip. If you have gathered the material, you cannot escape from gossiping. What you have taken in will certainly come out. Do not take things in, and you will be able to avoid gossip.

Gossiping is simply another form of judging. Remember that you will be judged in the very way that you judge others. So it is better not to judge. And the best way not to judge is not to know. Learn to be ignorant of so many things. The best way is not to know anything about others. Then you will have nothing to talk about. You can honestly tell people that you do not know. Even when you do know something, you should refuse to talk about it. This is the proper way not to judge others.

Idle Words

Matthew 12:36 says that we shall give account of every idle word in the day of judgment. All our idle words will be judged at that time. We should not think that after gossiping there is no further problem, for the Lord has said that our idle words will be judged. When I was young, before the invention of the tape recorder, I wondered as I read this verse how our every word could be recorded. Yet today even human beings have invented the tape recorder. There may be some kind of tapes in the heavens that have recorded all our speaking. We need to be careful. One day the Lord may say, “Listen to this tape of your conversation in the sisters’ house.” The best way not to judge is

not to talk. I am sorrowful if I hear of rumors spreading among the saints. These rumors are due to talking, and the talking is a kind of judgment. If you want to refrain from judging, cease your idle talking. Then you may ask me, "Brother, what shall we do with our mouth? God gave us two lips and a tongue. We have to use our mouth." That is right. Whenever we come together, we need to use our mouth to call upon the name of the Lord and to praise Him. We need to fellowship about the Lord's grace. We have many positive things to talk about. Why should we discuss negative and unprofitable things?

Do not criticize others or try to correct them. You may think that there is a little splinter in your brother's eye, but you do not realize there is a beam in your eye (7:3). If you are going to remove that splinter, you must first realize that the source is in your own eye. If you remove the beam in your eye, you will find that the splinter in his eye is gone. The trouble is not with the eye of your brother; it is actually with your own eye. Therefore, do not try to pluck out the splinter from your brother's eye, but remove the beam from your own eye; and you will find that the splinter in his eye has disappeared.

Having Discernment

If you are loose in speaking, you will lose your discernment. You will be unable to discern the right time to speak and the proper thing to say about the Lord. Because you have lost your discernment, you will give the holy things to the dogs and cast your pearls before the hogs (v. 6). You will be unable to detect the right times and the right persons with whom you should share the holy things of God. Some people are like dogs, and we should not give the holy things to them. Other people are like hogs, and we should not cast our pearls before them. What are the holy things? In Matthew 7:6 the holy things represent the truths of God. Every truth of God is a holy thing. The pearls represent our experiences of Christ. When we present the truth to people, we need discernment. We must discern what we should share and to what extent we should speak. If we are talkative, we will speak without discernment, without restriction, and we will present the holy things of God to the wrong person. We need to have discernment to recognize when there are dogs before us. At that time, we need to exercise our spirit to restrict our talk. We should realize that some people are hogs. We should not present our experiences of Christ to them. If we do, they will trample on them and cause a great deal of damage.

Now we can understand why the Lord Jesus connected this matter of discernment with the matter of judgment. If we know how to refrain from judging and how to exercise our spirit to have full control over our speaking, we will have the discernment to know the right person and the right time to share the truths of God and our experiences of Christ. Having this discernment depends upon our exercise in refusing to judge. We should never speak in a critical, judging way about other people or about other local churches.

Prayer

Our talking is also related to another very important matter—the matter of prayer. In Matthew 7:7-8 the Lord said that if we ask, we will receive; that if we seek, we will find; that if we knock, it shall be opened to us. Asking, seeking, and knocking are linked with our judging. The Lord was indicating that a judging person cannot have a proper prayer life. The more we judge or talk or gossip, the less we will be able to pray. This is certain. On the contrary, the less we gossip and talk, the more we will pray. If, on the one hand, we would practice not talking, gossiping, or judging and, on the other hand, exercise the proper discernment in sharing the truths of God and the experiences of Christ with others, then we will be able to pray. First we ask; then we seek and knock. Sometimes asking is sufficient. At other times we need to seek and to knock. We may say that we ask for the Lord's grace, seek after the Lord's person, and knock for the Lord's presence. It is easy to have the Lord's grace, but it is difficult to have the Lord's person and even more difficult to have the Lord's presence.

A proper prayer life is linked to "Do not judge." If we do not talk in a loose way and if we do not speak about God's truths and our experiences of Christ in a careless way, we will have a proper prayer life. We will have the ground to ask, seek, and knock.

This section concludes with Matthew 7:12, which says, "Therefore all that you wish men would do to you, so also you do to them; for this is the law and the prophets." This means that if we expect others to treat us in a particular way, we should first treat them in that way. Do not treat others differently from the way that you yourself expect to be treated. This is the principle. Be fair. If you want other people to treat you in a certain way, you should treat them in the same way.

By His Life

We cannot fulfill any of these requirements by the life we received from our natural birth. But by our new birth we have received the divine life that can fulfill all of them. I am certain that the Lord Jesus in you will never be talkative. Whenever I see a sister gossiping or a brother talking excessively, I always shake my head because I realize that the Lord Jesus would never talk like that. Such gossiping surely is not the Lord. He will never gossip and talk that much. Praise the Lord! He is our life!

THE GROUNDS OF THE CHILDREN OF THE KINGDOM

Now we proceed to the last aspect of the kingdom life—the grounds of the children of the kingdom of the heavens for their walk and work (vv. 13-29). Please note that *grounds* is in the plural number. There is not only one ground but several. Our walk and behavior, our living and our work, must have a proper ground. Whatever we are and do must be solidly based upon a proper ground.

A Narrow Gate and a Constricted Way

The first ground is the narrow gate and the constricted way (vv. 13-14). Both the gate and the way are narrow. The King James Version of the Bible says that the gate is strait and that the way is narrow. In this verse, however, both words mean “narrow.” The difference is that the narrowness of the gate is rather short, and the narrowness of the way is quite long. The gate is narrow for just a short distance, but the way is narrow for a long distance. It may be easy to get in through the narrow gate, but it is difficult to walk the constricted way. The way is very constricted. We should not say that the gate is constricted, for the gate is narrow. The gate is not a matter of constriction; it is a matter of narrowness. The way, however, is a matter of constriction. In other words, the width of the gate and the width of the way are the same. The only difference is that with the gate there is no length, but with the way there is length. Both our gate and our way are narrow. According to our human concept, we may think that the gate at the beginning is narrow, but the way will broaden as we proceed. But in the kingdom the whole way is narrow. Will you take this way? Because the way is narrow, it is also constricted. While we are on this way, we have no possibility of changing lanes because there is only one lane. We cannot move from left to right or from right to left as we might

on a freeway. Also, there is no way to overtake others. We must be patient. We should not attempt to overtake some who are in front of us; if we do, we will find ourselves out of the way. Although the way is narrow and constricted, it leads to life. In this verse *life* does not refer to the seed of the kingdom but to the harvest of the kingdom.

We have seen that there are two aspects of the kingdom: the seed and the harvest. Both of these are Christ as our life. Christ is the seed of the kingdom as our life, and Christ will be the harvest of the kingdom as our life. Concerning the seed, we need the life to come into us, but concerning the harvest, we need to enter into the life. In the Bible there are these two sides: the zoe life comes into us, and we enter into the zoe life. The zoe life has entered into everyone who believes in the Lord Jesus, but not all genuine believers will enter into the zoe life in the future. To have the zoe life enter into us means that we are saved; to enter into the zoe life in the future means that we will enter into the manifestation of the kingdom, into the wedding feast. To have eternal life enter into us means that we have Christ as the seed, but to enter into the eternal life in the future means that we have Christ matured in us. In Matthew 7:14 it is not a question of zoe life coming into us but of entering into the zoe life. What gate and what way lead us into the zoe life, into the harvest of the kingdom? Certainly it is the narrow gate and the constricted way.

Both the gate and the way are narrow. If you have ever experienced Christ in this way, you will realize how narrow it is. Although we need to be flexible, we should not be broad. Neither our gate nor our way is broad. The gate is narrow like the eye of a needle. In Matthew 19:24 the Lord Jesus used the example of a camel going through the eye of a needle to illustrate the narrowness of the gate leading into the harvest of the kingdom. Do you know how big you are by birth? You are at least as big as a camel. By birth you became a camel, and then you acquired a heavy load. This is the proper meaning of the Lord's word in Matthew 19:24. We are camels by our natural birth, and the eye of the needle is the narrow gate for us to enter into the maturity of the kingdom. As camels we have been fully loaded with worldly things, making it impossible for us to pass through the eye of a needle. But the Lord can do it! He can reduce us. We all have experienced the Lord's reducing. He has a way to do it. When you say, "Lord Jesus, I love You," He replies, "I will reduce you. The more you love Me, the more you should be prepared for Me to reduce you. Then it will be easy for you to pass through the eye of a

needle." Regardless of how narrow the gate may be, we can pass through easily after we are reduced. As the reduced ones, we can enter into the narrow gate and proceed along the constricted way. This is the way that leads into the maturity of the kingdom, into the zoe life. The zoe life has already come into us, but now we are walking the constricted way to enter into the zoe life, into the harvest, into the maturity of the kingdom. This maturity of the kingdom is the full manifestation of the zoe life.

Many Christians claim to be right in certain matters. We should not listen to their claims but test them according to the narrow gate and the constricted way. Are they walking on a broad way? Do they find it easy to overtake others? Are they able to do whatever they like? If so, they are not on the constricted way leading to the harvest of the kingdom. Instead, they are on the broad way. The broad gate and the broad way lead to destruction. In Greek the word for *destruction* has two meanings: "to perish or be lost" and "to be destroyed." Here it does not mean to perish or to be lost. It means to have all of your work destroyed. The same thought is found in Matthew 7:24-27, which mentions the house built upon the sand. When the rain descends from above, when the river rises, and when the winds blow, that house will be destroyed. You as a person will be preserved, but your work will be destroyed. This means that you yourself will be saved, but your work—all that you have accomplished after being saved—will be destroyed. The concept in these two verses does not relate to being saved or lost. To enter into life does not mean to be saved, because no unsaved person can enter through the narrow gate. No unsaved person can ever walk the constricted way. Everyone who passes through the narrow gate and walks the constricted way is a saved person. Rather, it means that after we are saved, we should consider our walk and our work. These matters will affect our future. If our work is destroyed, we will suffer a loss (1 Cor. 3:15). If our work is preserved, we will receive the reward of entering into the kingdom. To be saved is one thing, and to enter into the full enjoyment of the kingdom is another. This full enjoyment of the kingdom is signified by the wedding feast.

To be called is to be saved. However, whether or not we will be chosen, that is, qualified for the wedding feast, is still pending. It depends on the gate that we enter and the way that we take. If we enter the broad gate and walk the broad way, our work and walk will be destroyed, and we will miss the wedding feast. If we take the narrow gate and the constricted way, this will lead us into

life, into the maturity of the zoe life, the harvest of the kingdom. Then we will enter the wedding feast.

Fruit of a Good Tree

The second ground of the children of the kingdom for their walk and work is the fruit brought forth of a good tree (vv. 15-20). In these verses there are grapes and figs and also thorns and thistles. These are from two sources. We have already seen that thorns and thistles come from Satan. In Genesis 3:18 Satan is revealed as the source of thorns and thistles. In the New Testament we see that Christ as the very expression of God is the source of grapes and figs. These two sources are two lives. Satan is the source of the life that brings forth thorns and thistles. Christ as God's expression is the source of the life that brings forth grapes and figs.

Never be deceived by teachings and practices. Check the fruits. The Fundamentalists may say that they are right, the Pentecostals may say that they are right, and the formal believers may say that they are right. We should not be influenced by their claims, but consider their fruits. Even if some of the local churches claim to be right, we should nevertheless check their fruits. It is absolutely not a matter of teachings or claims; it is a matter of fruits. The fruit is the ground. In order to know any person, group, or activity among today's Christians, we must check the fruits. Appreciation must be based upon the ground of the fruits. We should not be impressed by how much people talk and teach and claim. We should consider the fruits. The Lord Jesus Himself told us clearly that there are two categories of fruits. The false persons would never admit that they are false; instead, they would claim to be right. Therefore, we should not be affected by what people say but consider the fruit. Even as we know a tree by its fruit, we should also know a work by its fruit. Only care for the fruit. If the local church in a certain place is proper, we will surely see the fruit. What is the fruit? That is something of life which expresses itself as grapes and figs, not as thorns and thistles. We need to know a church, an individual, and a work by their fruits. The fruit is the ground.

The Will of God

The third ground is the will of God, not any works (Matt. 7:21-23). The day is coming when many will appear before the Lord and say, "Lord, Lord, was it

not in Your name that we prophesied, and in Your name cast out demons, and in Your name did many works of power?" But the Lord will declare to them, "I never knew you. Depart from Me, you workers of lawlessness." (The same Greek word translated "knew" in Matthew 7:23 is rendered "allow" in Romans 7:15 by the King James Version: "That which I do, I allow not.") This does not mean that he did not know but that he did not allow it. Here in Matthew 7:23 it is not that the Lord did not know them but that the Lord did not allow them to do those works. They prophesied, but the Lord never allowed them to prophesy. They cast out demons, but the Lord never allowed them to cast out demons in that way. They performed miracles, but the Lord never allowed them to do miracles in such a manner. What the Lord wanted them to do was the will of God. What is the will of God? It is the coming of the kingdom. "Your kingdom come; Your will be done, as in heaven, so also on earth" (6:10).

In the Epistles we are told that the will of God is the Body life. Romans 12:2 says that we should not be fashioned according to this age, but be transformed by the renewing of the mind that we may prove what the will of God is. The will of God is unique—to have the church, the kingdom. It is not a matter of prophesying, casting out demons, or performing miracles. It is a matter of having the church life and the kingdom.

It may not seem logical to say that a person who is not in the will of God could perform miracles. How could a person who is outside God's will work miracles? Years ago I had the same thought. However, by experience I learned that people can do some miracles outside God's will. Recently, I learned of a man who performed many miracles in the name of the Lord yet whose personal life was base and immoral. Now we can understand why the Lord will not deny the claims of people who will come to Him saying that they have done miracles in His name. The Lord will not deny their claims, but He will tell them that He never allowed them to do those things. Be careful! Do not think that as long as your prophecy is fulfilled, you are right. Do not think that the miracles you perform will justify you. Even the casting out of demons, in itself, will not be your justification. The only justification available to us is to seek the kingdom, because the unique will of God is to have the kingdom.

The Word of Christ

Now we come to the last ground, the word of Christ as the rock. Our work must be according to the living word of Christ, not according to the dead letter. The living word of Christ is the rock upon which we may build. If our work is built upon the word of Christ as the rock, it will stand when the rain descends, the floods come, and the winds blow. Otherwise, our work will be destroyed when it is tested from these three directions. The rains signify the tests from God; the floods signify the tests from man; and the winds signify the tests from Satan. Some testings come from God, others from man, and still others from Satan. If our work is based upon the word of Christ as the rock, it will stand regardless of the tests. The tests sent by God as the rain will not destroy that work. On the contrary, the more the rain descends, the stronger the work will become.

In Matthew 5 through 7 many aspects of the life of the kingdom people are covered by the Lord's words. May the Lord open our eyes to see and our hearts to receive. However, we must realize that the Lord never intended for us to carry out these words in ourselves. These words are simply the revelation of the reality of the kingdom life. Our natural human life is inadequate. In Matthew 5 through 7 we see the living and the reality of the Lord Jesus as the divine life. After seeing this, we all must say, "Lord Jesus, You are the reality. You are the life for the reality of the kingdom. Your life satisfies the requirements of the kingdom. Lord, help me that I may open myself. Lord, come in day by day to nourish me, saturate me, possess me, transform me, and make me a part of Your maturity, to give me a share in the full manifestation of the kingdom." Eventually, every aspect of the reality of the kingdom in these three chapters will be found in our lives. Our daily life and our work will correspond exactly to what is described in these chapters. We will be in the reality of the kingdom, and we will even become the reality of the kingdom.

CHAPTER THIRTY-FIVE

THE APPEARANCE OF THE KINGDOM

Scripture Reading: Matt. 5:3, 8, 10-11, 20; 7:21; 18:3; 13:24-33; 16:6; Mark 8:15

As we have mentioned previously, Matthew 5, 6, and 7 unveil the reality of the kingdom. We should not consider that these chapters are merely dispensational and relate only to the future. These chapters must also apply to our present situation in the church life. The proper church life is the reality of the kingdom. The reality of the kingdom can be found in the proper church life.

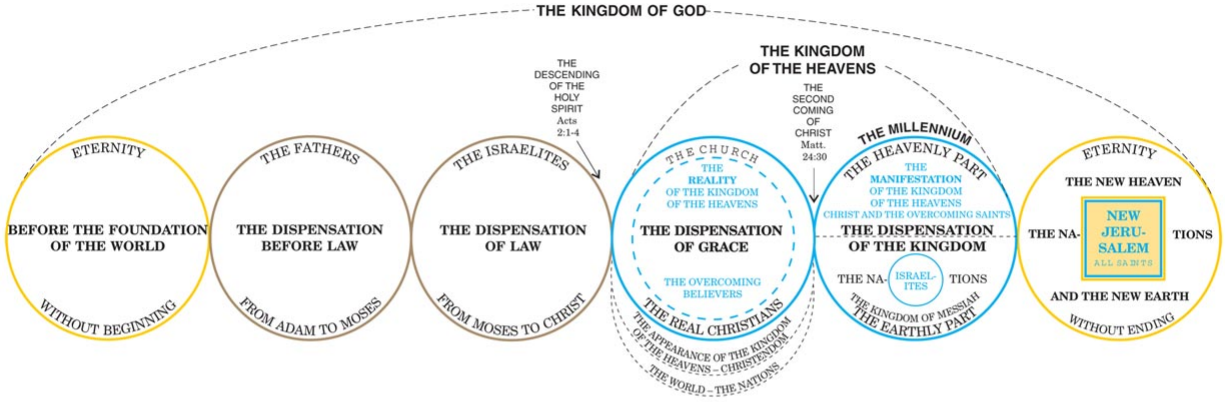
We have also seen that Matthew contains many seeds of the truth. The seeds are sown in Matthew and developed in the Epistles. For example, in Matthew 5 the seed of the human spirit is sown. The Lord said, "Blessed are the poor in spirit." The seed of the heart is also sown, for the Lord said, "Blessed are the pure in heart." In the Epistles there are many verses concerning our spirit and our heart. While Matthew mentions our spirit and our heart in a very brief way, the Epistles mention our spirit and our heart in many verses. This indicates that our spirit and our heart are sown as a seed in Matthew. Then there is the blossoming of the seed in the Epistles. Based upon this principle, we can see that Matthew 5, 6, and 7 are not simply related to a future dispensation. They are also for our present situation.

THREE ASPECTS OF THE KINGDOM

In order to understand this matter of the kingdom of the heavens, we must realize that there are three aspects of the kingdom. If we do not see these three aspects, we can never fully understand the real definition of the kingdom in Matthew. These three aspects are: the reality of the kingdom, the outward appearance of the kingdom, and the manifestation of the kingdom. In Matthew these three aspects are covered in three great sections. In Matthew 5—7 the Lord Jesus presented the reality of the kingdom of the heavens. The parables spoken by the sea in Matthew 13 revealed the appearance of the kingdom, and the prophecies in Matthew 24 and 25 revealed the manifestation of the kingdom. The reality of the kingdom and the

appearance of the kingdom are present today, but the manifestation of the kingdom will be in the future. In order to better understand the difference between these three aspects of the kingdom, please **refer to the chart** below, which shows the difference between the kingdom of the heavens and the kingdom of God. According to the chart, *the kingdom of God* is a general term that includes six aspects. The kingdom of God is the rule or government of God from eternity past to eternity future. The first circle represents the section of the kingdom of God before creation. The second circle represents the portion of the kingdom of God before the law, that is, from Adam to Moses (Rom. 5:14), and the third circle represents the portion of the kingdom of God covered by the dispensation of law, that is, from Moses to Christ (John 1:17). The fourth and fifth circles represent the kingdom of the heavens including the millennium. The final circle represents the new heaven and the new earth with the New Jerusalem.

A CHART SHOWING THE DIFFERENCE
BETWEEN THE KINGDOM OF THE HEAVENS AND THE KINGDOM OF GOD



ETERNITY PAST Eph. 1:4 1 Pet. 1:20	FROM THE CREATION OF ADAM TO THE DECREE OF THE LAW Rom. 5:13-14	FROM THE DECREE OF THE LAW TO THE COMING OF GRACE John 1:17	THE KINGDOM OF THE HEAVENS IS NEAR Matt. 3:2; 4:17; 10:7 THE BEGINNING OF THE KINGDOM OF THE HEAVENS Matt 16:18-19; 13:24; 22:2 THE CHURCH 1 Tim. 3:15; Eph. 1:22b-23 THE REALITY OF THE KINGDOM OF THE HEAVENS Matt. 5–7 THE APPEARANCE OF THE KINGDOM OF THE HEAVENS Matt. 13:24-42	THE MILLENNIUM Rev. 20:4-6 (1) THE HEAVENLY PART The manifestation of the kingdom of the heavens Matt. 24:46-47; 25:19-23; Luke 19:15-19; Rev. 2:26-27; 3:21; 2 Tim. 2:12 "The kingdom of the Father" Matt. 13:43 with Christ and the overcoming saints as the kings (2) THE EARTHLY PART The kingdom of Messiah 2 Sam. 7:13 "The tabernacle of David" Acts 15:16 The restored kingdom of Israel Acts 1:6 "The kingdom of the Son of Man" Matt. 13:41; Rev. 11:15 with: (a) the saved Israelites Rom. 11:26-27; Zech. 12:10; Ezek. 36:25-28 as the priests Zech. 8:20-23; Isa. 2:2-3 and (b) the restored nations Acts 3:21 as the people Matt. 25:32-34	THE NEW HEAVEN AND THE NEW EARTH Isa. 65:17; 66:22; 2 Pet. 3:13; with: (1) the New Jerusalem as the administrative center Heb. 12:22; Rev. 21 (a) constituted of all the redeemed and perfected saints, the sons of God Rev. 21:6-7 (b) these perfected saints as the kings Rev. 22:5 and (2) the purged nations as the people Rev. 21:3-4, 24, 26; 22:2b

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In the fourth section there are four circles that represent various aspects of the kingdom of the heavens. The innermost circle represents the reality of the kingdom of the heavens. These are the overcoming believers. The believers in this circle are like those mentioned in Matthew 5, 6, and 7. They are poor in spirit, pure in heart, hungering for righteousness, meek, merciful, and have the surpassing righteousness. These are not only believers but overcoming believers. Thus, they represent the reality of the kingdom today. They are *in* the reality of the kingdom, and they *are* the reality of the kingdom.

Surrounding this innermost circle is a second circle that represents the church which is composed of all real Christians. This indicates that not all the real Christians are in the reality of the kingdom, but they are in the church. Because they have been bought by the blood of the Lamb and because they have been reborn of the Holy Spirit, they are real Christians. Thus, they are a part of the church. But whether, after they are reborn, they will be overcomers is something pending. In the church there are two categories of real Christians. One category is those who are reborn but who are not overcoming. A higher category is the overcoming Christians. The overcoming Christians represent the reality of the kingdom. The overcoming Christians plus all the real, but defeated Christians compose the church.

Outside the second circle there is a third circle, which represents the appearance of the kingdom. Some today are Christians in name only. They are the so-called nominal Christians; they are not real. They are in Christendom, but they are not in the church. They have never been redeemed by the blood, and they have never been reborn of the Spirit. They are Christians only in name. This means they are tares, not wheat. Outside the third circle, there is the fourth circle, which represents the world or the nations. According to this chart, there is the reality of the kingdom, the church, and the appearance of the kingdom. The appearance of the kingdom is today's Christendom. There is very little difference and separation between Christendom and the world.

Thus, we may say that there are basically three kinds of Christians: first are the victorious, overcoming Christians who are in the reality of the kingdom of the heavens and also in the church. The second are the true believers who are defeated. They are in the church because they are real believers, but they are not in the reality of the kingdom of the heavens. The third group are those who are Christians in name only. Christendom is full of such nominal Christians. These are not actually in the church. Of course, outside

Christendom there is the world with all the unbelievers. The biggest group of people on the earth today are the unbelievers. Perhaps the second biggest group are the false Christians of Christendom. The next largest group are the real Christians who are the church, and the smallest group are the overcoming ones within the church. These three groups of people are included within the age or dispensation of the church.

Following this section, there is the second section of the kingdom of the heavens, the manifestation of the kingdom. After the dispensation of the church, the Lord will come back, and the kingdom of the heavens will be manifested. This aspect will be in the future and will include the millennium. In the New Testament the millennium is clearly revealed to be of two parts: the upper part, the heavenly part, and the lower part, the earthly part. The upper part is the manifestation of the kingdom. This is the heavenly part where the Lord Jesus and all the overcoming saints will be reigning as kings. The lower part is composed of the revived nation of Israel in the center, teaching the nations how to serve God.

Matthew 5, 6, and 7 show us the reality of the kingdom. They reveal the internal or interior reality found in the kingdom. The first aspect of the people who are living in the reality of the kingdom is that they are poor in spirit. "Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of the heavens" (5:3). This is something real. Please note that the verb here is not in the future tense. It does not say theirs *shall* be the kingdom. Rather, it says theirs *is* the kingdom. This means that the reality of the kingdom is something real and present today. It is not merely something in the future. Another verse says, "Blessed are those who are persecuted for the sake of righteousness, for theirs is the kingdom of the heavens" (v. 10). Here are some who are persecuted for being right, for the sake of righteousness. And they themselves are hungering and thirsting for righteousness. They are even willing to pay a price and to suffer for the sake of righteousness. This indicates how real it is to them. Again, this also is something for today, not merely something for the future. Surely this is the reality of the kingdom. Then Matthew 7:21 says, "Not everyone who says to Me, Lord, Lord, will enter into the kingdom of the heavens, but he who does the will of My Father who is in the heavens." This too is something of the reality. Another verse, Matthew 18:3, says, "Truly I say to you, Unless you turn and become like little children, you shall by no means enter into the kingdom of the heavens." These four verses refer to the first

aspect, the reality of the kingdom. They indicate something so real, pure, and genuine.

THE APPEARANCE OF THE KINGDOM

In Matthew 13 there are three parables that indicate the outward appearance of the kingdom. These three parables are: the parable of the tares, the parable of the mustard seed becoming a great tree, and the parable of the leaven. In contrast to the reality of the kingdom of the heavens, these three parables show us matters that are not real and genuine. The tares are false ones. The great tree is not proper. It has grown up out of proportion, not after its kind (Gen. 1:11-12). Furthermore, the leaven indicates something ruined, corrupted, and even corrupting. We all must be very clear concerning these three parables. Then we will be clear where we have to stand. May the Lord give all of us a very clear sky! May He blow away the clouds and the smog and bring us under a clear expanse, a crystal-clear sky (Ezek. 1:22).

Tares

In the second parable, Matthew 13:24-30, the Lord Jesus began to use the phrase *the kingdom of the heavens has become like*... The man who sowed good seed in his field was the sower in the first parable, the Lord Jesus Himself. "But while the men slept, his enemy came and sowed tares in the midst of the wheat and went away" (v. 25). We know that this word began to be fulfilled a short while after the day of Pentecost. From the day of Pentecost thousands of believers were added to the church, and some false ones also were added. These were the tares among the wheat. From reading Acts you can realize there was such a possibility. This parable of the tares is related to the church from the beginning of the kingdom of the heavens. The kingdom of the heavens begins with the second parable, because it is at this time that the Lord used the phrase *the kingdom of the heavens has become like*. We all need to consider and even to reconsider our situation as to whether we are tares or wheat. We must have the full assurance that we are wheat. What does it mean to be real wheat? If a person really believes in the Lord Jesus—that the Lord Jesus died for his sins, that He was resurrected, and that now the Lord Jesus is the life-giving Spirit indwelling him—surely that person is wheat. Some people say that they are Christians and that they believe in the Lord Jesus, but they do not believe that the Bible is the divine revelation of God. Such so-called Christians are surely tares. We should never consider such a

person as our brother. To say that we are wheat means we believe that the Bible is the divine revelation of God, fully inspired by the Spirit of God, and it means that we consider the Bible as the final and full authority.

Another group of people who also call themselves Christians do not believe that Jesus is God. Many of them only believe that Christ was a good and superior man. This is a great heresy because they do not believe that Jesus Christ is the Son of God and even God Himself. Such people are also tares.

Another group of people who are tares are the so-called Christians who do not believe that the Lord Jesus Christ died on the cross for our sins. Rather, they consider the Lord's crucifixion as a kind of martyrdom. We must realize that the Lord Jesus did not die on the cross as a martyr but to accomplish our redemption. The Lord Jesus was on the cross for six hours, from nine o'clock in the morning until three o'clock in the afternoon. During the first three hours, from nine to twelve, He was persecuted and damaged by man. But during the last three hours, from twelve noon until three o'clock, He was suffering not at the hand of man but at the hand of God. At that time God was judging Him for our sake, reckoning Him as our Substitute (2 Cor. 5:21). First He was persecuted by man, and then He was judged by God. Thus, His death was not a kind of persecution and martyrdom but was to accomplish redemption for us. Some so-called Christians do not believe that the Lord Jesus died on the cross for our redemption. This means they do not believe Isaiah 53. This indicates that they are tares. In summary, if a person claims to be a Christian and yet does not believe that the Bible is inspired by God word by word, that the Lord Jesus is the Son of God, even God Himself, and that the Lord Jesus died on the cross for our redemption, that person is a tare. He is not a real, genuine believer.

What then is a real Christian? A real Christian is one who realizes that he is sinful, fallen, and lost. He believes in the Lord Jesus as the Son of God who was incarnated to be a man, died on the cross for our sins, and was resurrected from the dead to be the life-giving Spirit. He believes that the Lord Jesus as the Spirit is now within him as his very life and everything to him. This is a real Christian, and this is the wheat. Do not test whether you are wheat or tares according to your feelings. Your feelings are very fluctuating. In the morning you may feel that you are wheat, but by the evening you may feel that you are a tare. Do not trust in your feelings; rather, trust in the facts. If you believe that the Lord Jesus is the Son of God, that He

was incarnated to be man, that He died on the cross for your sins, and that today He is the Lord and the life-giving Spirit who has come into you, surely you are wheat. Do not be preoccupied by doctrines concerning tongues, baptism, communion, head covering, foot-washing, the rapture, the tribulation, the Sabbath, and many other things. Regardless of which side you take with all these doctrines, as long as you believe that the Lord Jesus is the Son of God who died for you and who arose and who is now sitting at the right hand of the Father, you are wheat. Remember, though, that Christendom includes not only the wheat but also the tares.

According to the Lord's clear definition in Matthew 13:38, the field where the tares grow is not our heart or the church but the world. The Lord Jesus said that the field is the world. He said that the tares should be allowed to grow and live in the world lest in uprooting them, some real wheat be damaged. Some have thought that the field is the church and that it is permissible for the wheat and the tares to be together in the church. This is absolutely wrong. The tares grow in the world, not in the church. It is not that there should be some real Christians and some false Christians growing together in the church. In all the local churches we only accept the real wheat. We do not accept the tares. Many denominations are full of tares. In some denominations there are many more tares than there are real Christians. What a poor situation! That is the appearance of the kingdom of the heavens. It is not a real and genuine situation for the Lord. Rather, it is false. It only has the appearance of the kingdom of the heavens, not the reality. In Matthew 13 the Lord Jesus likened these three parables to the kingdom of the heavens. He said that the kingdom of the heavens is likened to the tares, to the great tree, and to the leaven. We must realize that this is not the real thing; this is the false thing. By comparing what is mentioned in Matthew 13 with what is mentioned in Matthew 5, 6, and 7, we can see that these are two different aspects. In chapters 5, 6, and 7 there is the aspect of the reality of the kingdom of the heavens. But in chapter 13 with the tares, the great tree, and the leaven, there is the outward appearance of the kingdom.

The Mustard Seed

The third parable is the parable of the mustard seed. "Another parable He set before them, saying, The kingdom of the heavens is like a mustard seed, which a man took and sowed in his field, and which is smaller than all the seeds; but when it has grown, it is greater than the herbs and becomes a tree,

so that the birds of heaven come and roost in its branches" (vv. 31-32). The seed mentioned here is the seed of life and is signified by a small mustard herb. The mustard is something good for food. This signifies the proper condition of the church. The proper church should come out of the seed of life and, like the mustard plant, be good for food. According to its nature and form, it should be small and good for food. In this parable, however, the small mustard herb changed its form, its nature, and its condition to become a great tree in which the birds of heaven could lodge. In the Lord's own explanation of the first parable, the birds signify the evil one, the devil (v. 19). The devil is the one who comes to snatch away the word of life from people. The bird in singular number signifies the devil, and the birds in plural number signify the persons, evil spirits, and other things related to the devil. All the evil spirits and evil persons related to the devil come into the big tree to lodge.

What is this great tree? According to church history, in A.D. 313 Constantine embraced Christianity as the national religion of the Roman Empire. By this he opened the door to let many unregenerated people come into the church. He both encouraged and rewarded people for becoming Christians. Whoever was baptized received a robe and an amount of silver. Instead of persecuting the church, the Roman Empire began to welcome the church. From that time onward, the church became a great tree; it became Christendom. Countless evil birds, evil spirits, and evil persons came to lodge in the branches of that tree. Who can say how many evil persons and evil spirits are lodging in its branches!

There are many false ones in today's Christendom. Many of these are rational, philosophical people of high attainment and positions. They have helped Christianity to grow out of proportion, not according to its kind. They have caused the little mustard herb not to be according to its kind but rather to become a great tree. The little herb should produce something for eating, but the great tree has simply become a lodging place for the evil one. This is exactly today's situation in Christianity. There are so many branches that are suitable for the evil persons to lodge in. This is the outward appearance of the kingdom of the heavens.

Leaven

In the outward appearance of the kingdom of the heavens, there are not only the tares and the great tree, but there is also something hidden

within—the leaven. “Another parable He spoke to them: The kingdom of the heavens is like leaven, which a woman took and hid in three measures of meal until the whole was leavened” (v. 33). In the Scriptures leaven does not have a positive meaning. Rather, it indicates something corrupting and evil. The woman here is a figure of the Roman Catholic Church. In Revelation 17:3 John saw a woman sitting upon a scarlet beast. That woman is the Roman Catholic Church, and the beast is the Roman Empire. This indicates religion joined to politics. When Christianity became the national religion of the Roman Empire, the church was transmuted from a small mustard herb into a great tree full of evil things.

The woman took the leaven, signifying sinful, evil, and corrupting things, and put it into the fine meal. The fine meal signifies Christ as life in the form of food. The Roman Catholic Church takes the real things of Christ, represented by the meal, and adds false things, represented by the leaven. Among some of the Protestant churches, there are the modernists who do not believe that the Lord Jesus is the Son of God or that He is God or that He was born of a virgin. The Catholic Church does not have this kind of heresy. They do recognize that Christ is the Son of God, even God Himself, and that He was born of a virgin. In this sense they do have the fine meal, but they have added much leaven into the meal, including many heathen teachings, heresies, and pagan things. For example, the birth of Christ may be considered as meal, but Christmas has been added as a kind of leaven. The incarnation of Christ is meal, but Christmas is leaven. Christ is the fine meal, but images and pictures of Christ are leaven. In some believers’ homes, I have seen pictures of Christ. Those are not a true likeness of Christ. Those pictures portray Him as a beautiful person. Actually, the Bible says that when the Lord Jesus was on the earth, He had no beauty (Isa. 53:2). Those pictures are leaven.

One young sister whom I knew in the past desired to express her love to the Lord. Because she was a young Christian and did not know better, she bought a so-called picture of the Lord Jesus and placed it in her room. Daily she respected and appreciated and even bowed down to that picture. Later, she began to be possessed by a demon. When she got rid of the picture, the demon left. I beg you to get rid of all the pictures of Jesus. Those are a kind of leaven. What a great amount of leaven has been put into Christ as the fine meal.

In the Far East, although many have never called upon the name of the Lord Jesus, they still celebrate Christmas as a holiday. On December 25 they have a party for dancing and call it a holy party. According to ancient history, December 25 was celebrated as the birth of the sun god. When Christianity was accepted as the state religion in A.D. 313, the people were accustomed to celebrate December 25 as a festival to their heathen gods. In order not to disappoint the people, the Roman Catholic Church suggested that the festival be kept as a celebration of the birth of Christ. This is evil leaven. What is leaven? Leaven is something that is added to flour to make the bread enjoyable and easy to take. If leaven is left out, the bread is too hard to enjoy. Based upon this principle, the Roman Catholic Church has added many things to Christ in order to make Him easier to take. To tell people that Christ is the Spirit seemed to them too mysterious, so they felt it was better to put up an image representing Christ so that people could understand Christ. To set up an image or picture to help people contact Christ is an evil leaven. In one place I saw some superstitious people come to kiss the foot and touch the hand of a stone image of Mary. This is leaven. They do preach Christ, but they preach Christ plus all the paganism, heathenism, and many idols. These things are the appearance of the kingdom of the heavens; they are not the real thing.

Among Christians today, there are all kinds of leaven: leaven in doctrine, leaven in practice, leaven in power, and leaven in authority. In Matthew 16:6 and Mark 8:15 three kinds of leaven are mentioned: the leaven of the Pharisees, of the Sadducees, and of the Herodians. The leaven in Matthew 13 taken by the woman and mixed with the fine flour refers to all the evil, heretical, and pagan things adopted by the Roman Catholic Church.

By His mercy, we would take no leaven into the local churches. We would take only Christ. We would take only the pure, life-giving Spirit. Do not consider that this matter of the reality of the kingdom of the heavens and the appearance of the kingdom of the heavens is our invention. No! This is God's revelation in His holy Word. By comparing these two sections of Matthew, we can see that there is a great difference. In chapters 5 through 7 are many real, pure, and genuine things. But in Matthew 13, in the three parables, there are false and evil things. Thus, there is the reality of the kingdom of the heavens, and there is the appearance of the kingdom of the heavens. We are not in the appearance of the kingdom; we are in the reality of the kingdom. We must have nothing to do with the tares, the great tree, or the leaven. This is related

to being in the reality of the kingdom of the heavens, and this is the proper church life.

CHAPTER THIRTY-SIX

THE MANIFESTATION OF THE KINGDOM (1)

Scripture Reading: Matt. 25:1, 6, 10-12, 14-30

In the Gospel of Matthew, the Lord Jesus spoke of the kingdom on three different occasions. In the Sermon on the Mount, given in Matthew 5, 6, and 7, He spoke concerning the reality of the kingdom. In Matthew 13 in a discourse given at the seashore, He spoke concerning the appearance of the kingdom. Then on the Mount of Olives, the Lord Jesus spoke concerning the manifestation of the kingdom. The manifestation of the kingdom is related to the Lord's second coming. In a sense His second coming brings in the manifestation of the kingdom. We may also say that when the kingdom becomes matured within us, this maturity will bring the Lord's second coming. The manifestation of the kingdom is simply the maturity of Christ within us in His coming back.

THE TEN VIRGINS

Matthew 25, which reveals the manifestation of the kingdom, contains three important matters: the parable of the ten virgins, the parable of the talents, and the parable of the sheep and the goats. All three are related to the Lord's second coming, and all three are related also to the manifestation of the kingdom. In this chapter we will cover only the first two parables. The parable of the ten virgins is related to the manifestation of the kingdom because it says that the kingdom is likened to ten virgins. At midnight the Lord returns, and all ten of the virgins arise to go forth and meet Him. At that time five prudent virgins receive the reward and are able to enter into the wedding feast. Five others who are foolish are shut out from the wedding feast. In other words, five receive a reward, and five miss the reward. When the Lord Jesus comes back and the kingdom is manifested, all the real Christians will be judged. What we have done since we have been saved will be judged by the Lord Jesus at that time (1 Cor. 3:12-15). This will not be a judgment to determine whether we are saved or lost but to determine whether we will receive the reward or miss the reward. This is to determine whether we shall enter into the wedding feast or be shut out of the wedding feast. This matter is very clear in the parable of the ten virgins. Because of the lack of revelation in

past centuries, many Christians have considered that the five foolish virgins were not saved. But according to the pure Word, the five foolish virgins are real virgins. They may be foolish, but they are not false. Because one is foolish does not mean that he is false. One may be foolish and yet still be genuine. The five foolish virgins are real Christians, but they will miss something at the Lord's coming in the manifestation of the kingdom. Some real Christians will miss the wedding feast.

THE TALENTS

Now we come to the parable of the talents. As genuine Christians we have two aspects in our relationship with the Lord. The first aspect is the relationship of life, and the second is that of our work or function with the Lord. We have both a life and a work relationship with the Lord. On the one hand, we are the virgins waiting for the Lord's coming back. This is the side of life. On the other hand, we are also the Lord's servants, serving Him with the talents He has given us. This is the side of work. With the virgins the matter of love is a very important part. With the servants the matter of functioning and serving is the important part. We have to take care of these two aspects. In life we must be like virgins—prudent to get our vessel filled up with the Triune God. As to the matter of work and ministry, we must be the faithful servants who are exercising and using all the talents we have received from the Lord.

As virgins we need oil in our vessel; as servants we need to use our talents. Oil signifies the Spirit that fills up our spirit and eventually our whole inward being. The talents signify the gifts and functions of the Spirit. All real Christians have some gifts and functions given by the Lord. These functions are of the Spirit. If we would be those who love the Lord and who are waiting for His coming back, we need the infilling of the Spirit for the maturity of life. Furthermore, we need to use the gifts or the talents given to us by the Spirit to serve the Lord.

In the parable of the talents, the Christians were in three categories. Those in the first category received five talents, those in the second received two talents, and those in the third received one talent. According to the parable, the problem was not with the first or second category but only with the third. There was no problem with those who had received five talents or with those who had received two, but the problem was with those who had received only one talent. The five-talented ones represent the stronger believers who have

more gifts and more functions. It seems somewhat easy for the five-talented ones and the two-talented ones to function and serve the Lord. But it seems more difficult for the less talented members to serve. Why? It is because they consider that they have received so little. They consider that their function, their service, and their work mean nothing. Because they do not have a large portion, they tend to let the more gifted ones replace them in their function. The danger is for the one-talented members to give up their function. But there is no excuse. All must serve. To the consideration of the one-talented members, the Lord is a hard master. He gathers where He does not scatter, and He reaps where He has not sown.

One day the Lord will come back, and when He comes back, He will reckon with all His servants. All His servants will have to settle their accounts with Him. At the Lord's coming back, the problem will not be with the five-talented or the two-talented believers. The problem will be with the one-talented ones. They will excuse themselves, saying that the Lord is too hard. And the Lord will not deny that He is hard. In a sense the Lord is really hard. He does reap where He did not sow, and He does gather where He did not scatter. So in a sense, it is right to say that the Lord is hard. If you have ever been in the Lord's service, you do have the experience that, in a sense, the Lord is hard. For example, concerning the church meetings, do not consider that you can function because you feel that the Lord has given you something. Many times it is not like this. Rather, when you come in, your sensation may be that you have nothing, but the Lord still requires you to function. You may excuse yourself, saying that the Lord has given you nothing. This means that the Lord has not scattered anything to you or sown anything into you, but now He requires some reaping, some harvesting. Many times this is the principle in God's economy. This is the way of the Lord. This is because, on the one hand, we all have to learn to be diligent, and on the other hand, we all have to be those who serve by faith.

Sometimes we come to the meeting in an idle, sloppy, and slothful way. We excuse ourselves by saying that we are tired, and we come with no intention of functioning. We only come to rest and to enjoy some testimonies, to listen, and perhaps to criticize a little. This becomes our enjoyment. Even our criticism becomes an enjoyment. This is to be sloppy, slothful, and idle. Contrariwise, we should come to the meetings with a "Praise the Lord!" Regardless of whether we are tired and regardless of our situation, we need to function. We may be tired, but He is unlimited. We are nothing, but He is

everything. We are tired, but He never tires. We have nothing to say, yet we have to say something. We have nothing to minister, but we must function by faith. If you will open your mouth, the word will come out. The way to dig out your buried talent is to open your mouth. Do not bury your talent. Dig it out. Do not excuse yourself for any reason.

Many brothers and sisters have learned not to come to me with these kinds of excuses. I never sympathize with them. When they come to tell me how weak they are and how much help they need, I do not sympathize with them. The weaker they are, the less I sympathize with them. They are weak because they say they are weak. Eventually, you will be what you say you are. We all have to declare that we are not weak. In 2 Corinthians 12:10 Paul said that when he was weak, then he was powerful. Therefore, there is no excuse. If you come to me saying that all the brothers and sisters in your place are strong and doing well, I would like to come and visit you. But if you say how weak you are and how much help you need, I would tell you to help yourself. You must rise up to take care of your own situation.

Have you noticed what the Lord said in Matthew 25:28? "Take away therefore the talent from him and give it to him who has the ten talents." The Lord goes on to say in verse 29, "For to everyone who has, more shall be given, and he shall abound; but from him who does not have, even that which he has shall be taken away from him." This means that the more you have, the more the Lord will give you. The more you do not have, the more the Lord will take away from you. This is the Lord's economy. The Lord only gives to the rich ones. Whoever is poor receives nothing. Even the Lord takes away from the poor ones and gives to the rich ones. To those who have ten talents, the Lord gives one more. When you come to the meetings, never consider that you have nothing. If you consider that you have nothing, the Lord will take away what you do have and give it to another. This is the Lord's economy. Do not think this is my concept. This is the Lord's economy revealed in Matthew 25. Many times when I came to a meeting to minister, I had nothing. But when I went to the platform and opened my mouth, eventually a book came, a verse came, and the message came.

One Lord's Day morning in January 1968, I stood up encouraging all the saints to function and to say something. At that time I told them they could at least say four words. As I made this statement, within I was questioning, What four words? Then I said, "Number one," and even at that point I did not

know what word. Then I said, "*O*. Number two, *Lord*. Number three, *Amen*. Number four, *Hallelujah*." This is how the four words *O Lord! Amen! Hallelujah!* came. When I arrived home after the meeting, I considered that perhaps I had given the saints the wrong order of these words. Perhaps I should have put *Hallelujah* before *Amen*. Surely *Amen* should be after everything. Yet I told the people they could speak, "O Lord! Amen! Hallelujah!" But then I remembered Revelation 19. There the order is "Amen, Hallelujah!" not "Hallelujah! Amen." If you look into the matter, you will find that to say, "O Lord! Hallelujah! Amen!" is awkward for composing a song. It is difficult for anyone to make a song from these words. But to say, "O Lord! Amen! Hallelujah!" fits very well. This example illustrates that if we will open our mouths in faith, the Lord will give us something to say.

We all must realize that the Lord is hard. He does not give something to you, but He asks something of you. He does reap where He has never sown, and He does gather where He has never scattered. Whenever you open your mouth and function, immediately you open the way for the Lord to come out. He is rich in you, but you have to function by faith. How unfortunate that many Christians have never realized that after they are saved, they need to be wise virgins growing in life, and they need to be proper servants serving the Lord with the talents He has given them. We all must be the five prudent virgins, and we must be those who use their talents. Otherwise, when the Lord comes back, we will have a problem. At the time of the manifestation of the kingdom, we will have to account for our shortage. Many Christians only care for one thing: to be saved and to go to heaven. They think that as long as they are saved, one day they will go to heaven, and everything will be fine. We must say strongly, "No!" There will still be a problem.

From Matthew 13 we saw that the Lord has sown a seed and that we are all the wheat. But that was only the sowing stage. The reaping of the harvest is in chapters 24 and 25. In chapter 13 the Lord sowed the seed, and in chapters 24 and 25 He comes to reap. You cannot say that the Lord has not sown something into you. Neither can you say that the Lord is hard and that He never scattered anything to you. That is not fair to say, because He has at least scattered one talent to you. Can you say that you have received nothing from the Lord? At least you have received a little portion from the Lord. Regardless of how small the gift or the talent you have received from the Lord may be, you must use it. The more you use that little gift, the more it will be increased. If you will use it, it will be multiplied. The more you use your talent, the more

the Lord will give you. But the more you do not use the gift and talent the Lord has given you, the more you will lose. The Lord will take something from you. This is a serious situation.

Let us also read Matthew 25:30: “Cast out the useless slave into the outer darkness. In that place there will be the weeping and the gnashing of teeth.” You must realize that these are the words of the Lord. According to the word of the Lord in this verse, even a saved one could be cast into a kind of darkness. Do not ask me what kind of darkness. For sure it will not be pleasant. Do you think you will be laughing and rejoicing if you are in that darkness? Some have said that this slothful servant was never saved. This is not logical! If he has never been saved, how could he be a servant of the Lord? Furthermore, if he has never been saved, how could the Lord give him a talent or gift? No doubt this slothful servant is a saved one. All three are servants, and all three have received some talents. This strongly proves that all of them are saved. As far as salvation is concerned, there is no difference between the three of them. Can you say that because one is less talented, he is not saved? Can you say that the five-talented servant is fully saved, that the two-talented servant is half saved, and that the one-talented servant is not saved? If he has received a talent, surely he is saved. To say that a person can be lost due to slothfulness would indicate that salvation is not by grace but by works. But according to the divine principle, salvation is by grace. This parable is not related to salvation; it is related to something beyond salvation. It is related to how we serve the Lord after we have been saved.

All ten of the virgins are saved ones, and all three of the servants are also saved ones. The point is that even as saved ones we must be diligent to be filled up with the Spirit as prudent virgins, and we must be faithful to serve the Lord as diligent servants.

In verse 21, “His master said to him, Well done, good and faithful slave. You were faithful over a few things; I will set you over many things. Enter into the joy of your master.” This verse is not related to salvation but to a reward. Someone was invited into the joy of the master. The servant who received five talents was set over many things, and he entered into the joy of his master. In addition, the servant who received two talents was also set over many things, and he entered into the joy of his master. To enter into the joy of his master does not refer to salvation. This means that he received something as a reward in addition to salvation.

Concerning the slothful one, the Lord said in verses 24 through 28, “Then he who had received the one talent also came and said, Master, I knew about you, that you are a hard man, reaping where you did not sow, and gathering where you did not winnow. And I was afraid and went off and hid your talent in the earth; behold, you have what is yours. And his master answered and said to him, Evil and slothful slave, you knew that I reap where I did not sow and gather where I did not winnow. Therefore you should have deposited my money with the money changers; and when I came, I would have recovered what is mine with interest. Take away therefore the talent from him and give it to him who has the ten talents.” This does not mean that salvation was taken away from the slothful one, but it does mean that he suffered because of his lack of diligence.

If we are faithful servants using the talents that the Lord Jesus has given us, when He returns He will reward us. He will assign us to rule as kings over many things, and He will invite us to participate in His joy. But if we are saved and then are slothful and not faithful to use the talents He has given us, when He comes back He will reckon with us. Do not think that because you are saved there can be no problems. There can be a real problem if you are not faithful in your service. It is altogether possible that you will receive some punishment rather than a reward. We must take heed to the pure word of the Lord. Do not “dispensationalize” this chapter wholly to the future.

CALVINISM AND ARMINIANISM

Now we need to consider two basic concepts or schools concerning the matter of salvation. One is the Calvinistic school, and the other is the Arminian school. The Calvinistic school teaches eternal security and believes in predestination. According to the Calvinistic school, we were predestinated before the foundation of the world. Then we were born, we were called, we were justified, and we were saved according to God’s election. Once we are saved, we are eternally secure. No doubt this is absolutely right according to the Word of God. Many verses support the matter of predestination and eternal security. The Lord Jesus in John 10 said that once we receive eternal life, we can never be lost. On the one hand, the Calvinists are right concerning eternal security, but on the other hand, they are short of something because they have not seen Matthew 25:30. They have not seen that there could be some problem with a person after he is saved. They would wrongly say that this verse applies not to true believers but to false believers.

The Arminian school does not believe in the eternal security of the believer. According to their teaching, you may be saved in the morning and lost in the evening. Then after a few days you may be saved again. Later, you may be lost again. According to this concept, people may be saved and lost many times. We may call this “elevator salvation.” When they are saved, they are going up; when they are lost, they are going down. In their experience they are going up and down many times; they are saved and lost many times. This kind of concept is not right. They have picked up verses concerning reward and punishment at the Lord’s coming back and applied them to believers losing their salvation. According to their concept, for a person to suffer some punishment means that he is lost again. We must be clear that all three of the servants mentioned in Matthew 25 are saved, but the last one suffered some punishment by being cast into the outer darkness. Forget the traditional teachings and come back to the pure Word. The Bible says that all three are servants, and the Bible says that the third servant, because of his slothfulness, suffered some punishment. Please read and even pray-read these verses in the Lord’s presence. Are you a servant with five talents, or two talents, or one talent? We all must be faithful to use the talents that the Lord has given us. Remember, one day the Lord Jesus will come, and He will reckon with us. We will have to hand over our talents and settle our accounts with Him. We have to be faithful to use what the Lord has given us. Otherwise, at His coming back, at the manifestation of the kingdom, we will suffer some punishment. We will not lose our salvation, but we will suffer something. We will surely miss reigning with the Lord during the millennium. May the Lord have mercy upon all of us!

CHAPTER THIRTY-SEVEN

THE MANIFESTATION OF THE KINGDOM (2)

Scripture Reading: Luke 19:11-27; Matt. 24:44-51; Luke 12:42-48; Matt. 19:28; 20:21-23; 2 Tim. 2:12a; Rev. 2:26-27; 3:21; 12:5; 20:4-6

As we have said previously, the Gospel of Matthew reveals three aspects of the kingdom of the heavens. In Matthew 5, 6, and 7 we see the reality of the kingdom. There the kingdom is revealed in a real, pure, and genuine manner. Those who are in the reality of the kingdom are poor in spirit, pure in heart, have the surpassing righteousness, do the will of God, and have become like little children. How pure and genuine the kingdom is in this portion!

The second section, however, in Matthew 13 has three terrible things: the tares, the great tree grown out of proportion, and the leaven added to the fine flour. There is a great contrast between these two sections. They are so different that it may seem these are two different kingdoms. But actually this is one kingdom with two aspects. The first aspect is the reality of the kingdom, and the second aspect is the outward appearance of the kingdom.

The last section of Matthew concerns the manifestation of the kingdom when the Lord Jesus will come back to the earth. When the Lord Jesus comes back, He will bring the kingdom with Him, and that will be the manifestation of the kingdom. The two parables in Matthew 25 are very significant. They show us that, at the manifestation of the kingdom, some of the saints will enter into the joy of the Lord, and others will not. In the parable of the ten virgins, the five prudent virgins will enter into the wedding feast, but the five foolish virgins will be shut out and sent to buy oil. This indicates that the five prudent virgins are living in the reality of the kingdom, but the five foolish ones are not. Then in the parable of the talents, the five-talented servant and the two-talented servant were able to enter into the joy of the Lord, but the one-talented servant was not. The servant with one talent missed the joy and also was put into darkness where there was weeping and gnashing of teeth. Please do not ask me where this darkness will be and what kind of darkness this will be. I cannot tell you. But I do know that we have such a word out of the Lord's mouth and such a word written in the Holy Scriptures. If you appreciate John 3:16, you must also appreciate Matthew 25:28-30. You

cannot simply pick up some words of the Lord according to your own taste. This is what many Christians do. They pick up verses that fit their own concept. They like to quote John 3:16, but they rarely quote Matthew 25:28-30. We do need this gospel of the kingdom. John 3:16 is good for the matter of life, but today many Christians need to hear the gospel of the kingdom. This is our great commission, not to preach baptism by immersion but to preach the gospel of the kingdom.

Some Christians today do not like to receive the book of Matthew, saying it relates only to the dispensation of the Jews. They say that Matthew is not written for Christians and Gentiles but for the Jews. However, if Matthew is not for us, then the Lord Jesus in chapter 1 is also not for us. Jesus, Jehovah the Savior, and Emmanuel, God with us, are not for us. It is not logical to say that the Lord Jesus in this book is only for the Jewish believers. In fact, in the church there is no Jew and no Greek (Col. 3:11). If we relegate this book to others, eventually we lose the Gospel of Matthew. It is really foolish to relegate the Gospel of Matthew to others and not to ourselves. If we love John 3:16, we must also love Matthew 25:28-30. If you hang a plaque of John 3:16 upon your wall, then surely you should also hang up a plaque of Matthew 25:28-30.

Do not argue in a doctrinal way concerning this matter. In your experience, do you have five talents, or two talents, or one talent? If you are in the third category having one talent, are you a faithful servant or not? You must realize that when the Lord Jesus returns, He will reckon with you. What will your condition be when the Lord comes to settle the account?

Because some say that Matthew is only for the Jews and not for us, we come now to the Gospel of Luke. In principle, what is mentioned in Luke is almost exactly the same. In Luke 19, while the religious people were expecting the kingdom of God to appear, the Lord Jesus spoke a parable to show them that it would not appear as they thought. Even in the Lord's word we can see the two aspects of the kingdom: on the one hand, the kingdom of God was among them, and on the other hand, the kingdom of God was coming. Beginning in Luke 19:11, the Lord indicated that the kingdom was far away. A certain nobleman went to a distant country to receive the kingdom. The distant country in this parable signifies the heavens where God the Father dwells. The Lord Jesus as the nobleman went to the distant country to receive the kingdom. This indicated to the Pharisees that the kingdom was not

appearing but was far away. While the nobleman was gone into the distant country, he distributed his capital to his slaves so that they could do business for him. The principles in this parable are exactly the same as those in Matthew 25. The first and the second slaves received praise from the nobleman and were given authority over ten cities and five cities respectively as a reward. This corresponds to Paul's word that we shall reign with Him (2 Tim. 2:12). To rule over the cities means to reign as a king.

The same concept is continued in the last book of the Bible, Revelation, where the overcomers will be given the authority to rule over the nations (2:26-27). They rule not only over the cities but also over the nations. Revelation 3:21 indicates that the overcomers will sit upon the throne with the Lord Jesus and reign with Him. Finally, Revelation 20:4-6 tells us that the overcomers reigned with Christ as kings for a thousand years.

I am very concerned that we are all still under the influence of the traditional Christian teachings concerning these verses. It is difficult for us to realize the significance of these serious verses because we have been saturated with other kinds of teachings. Because of this, when we come to these verses, it is difficult for us to be impressed and to absorb them in a proper way. May the Lord have mercy upon us that our concepts could be purged and that our mind could be pure and easily impressed with the pure Word of God.

You must realize that Luke 19 and Matthew 24 and 25 are the word of God. First of all the Lord calls the slave a wicked slave (Luke 19:22). An unsaved person cannot be a slave of the Lord. Nor can an unsaved person receive anything as a gift from the Lord. But here the slave received one mina from the Lord. Because that wicked slave did not use the portion that the Lord had given him, the Lord took away that portion and gave it to the one who had ten portions. This does not mean the slave lost his salvation, but it means he suffered a loss. What the Lord had given him was taken back.

Let us also consider Matthew 24. Verses 47 through 51 read, "Truly I say to you that he will set him over all his possessions. But if that evil slave says in his heart, My master delays, and begins to beat his fellow slaves and eats and drinks with the drunken, the master of that slave will come on a day when he does not expect him and at an hour which he does not know, and will cut him asunder and appoint his portion with the hypocrites. In that place there will be the weeping and the gnashing of teeth." The Word says that the master will

cut him asunder. To cut asunder does not mean to kill. If he were killed, there would be no weeping and gnashing of teeth. To cut asunder is an ancient expression signifying a serious punishment. The slave is still alive because after he is cut asunder, he is able to weep and gnash his teeth. What are the weeping and the gnashing of teeth? I do not know, but I am certain that it will not be pleasant. I am also certain that I do not want to be there. I am not here waiting upon the Lord to come back just to partake of the weeping and gnashing of teeth.

Some dispensational teachers may say that this portion in Matthew is only for the Jewish people. Let us then read Luke 12, which not only mentions the same thing in principle but even in a more serious way. Verses 46 and 47 say that the master of that slave "will cut him asunder, and will appoint his portion with the unbelievers. And that slave who knew his master's will and did not prepare or do according to his will, will receive many lashes." The fact that the slave knew his master's will proves it refers to a saved person. How could any unsaved person know the Lord's will? Surely this is a saved one. That slave who knows his Lord's will but who does not prepare or do according to His will, will receive many lashes. What are the lashes? I have no idea, but surely it will be a kind of punishment and will not be pleasant. Do you like to be beaten? You may say that this is only a parable; this is not a real beating. But either way it is not something that will cause you to be happy and joyful.

The Lord went on to say that the slave who knew not and yet committed things worthy of stripes will receive few lashes. "But to everyone to whom much has been given, much will be required from him; and to whom much has been committed, they will ask of him all the more" (v. 48). On the one hand, it is the mercy of God to be clear concerning these matters, but on the other hand, it eventually becomes a great responsibility. You need to pray over the pure word of God in these verses and consider where you are. Are you certain that you are any better than this evil slave? You may say that you cannot bear this kind of responsibility. But the Lord Jesus never asked you to bear it. Rather, the Lord's attitude is that He demands, and He also supplies. The only problem is that we would not take His supply. His grace is sufficient. Whenever we are weak, we are powerful. We should rather boast in our weaknesses, because at that time we can enjoy Christ as our sufficient grace (2 Cor. 12:9-10). There are no excuses. Do not say that you cannot make it. If you do, the Lord Jesus will ask whether or not He was in you. He will ask you why

you did not enjoy Him and apply Him to your situation and need. At that time, what will you say? All you can say is, “Lord, I didn’t want to apply You.” Then the Lord Jesus will say, “You are an evil, wicked slave.” These are not my words. These are the words of the Lord Jesus concerning the manifestation of the kingdom.

When the Lord Jesus returns and the kingdom is manifested, He will exercise His judgment over all the Christians. He will not judge the worldly people first but His own people. According to the parable of the ten virgins, if we are the foolish ones, we will miss the enjoyment of the wedding feast. The Lord has made this very clear. Moreover, according to the parable of the talents, we will not only miss something, but we will suffer something. It is not just a matter of missing something, but it is also a matter of suffering some punishment. Do not say that as long as you are saved, it is sufficient. As far as the eternal security of your salvation is concerned, it surely is sufficient. But before eternity there will be the time of the millennial kingdom. At the beginning of the millennial kingdom, the Lord will exercise His judgment over all of us, His believers, to decide whether or not we should be allowed to go into the wedding feast and into the reigning of the kingdom, into His joy. Also, He will decide whether or not we should suffer some punishment. This is not a small thing. If we are living in the reality of the kingdom today, when the Lord Jesus comes back, He will invite us into the manifestation of the kingdom, and we will receive the reward. If not, we will miss the reward of the wedding feast, and we will suffer some punishment.

Matthew 19 tells us something further concerning the reigning and ruling aspect of the kingdom. It tells us that when the Lord Jesus will reign during the millennium, His apostles such as Peter, James, and John will also reign with Him. Matthew 5, 6, and 7 do not cover the reigning aspect. They only cover the reality of the kingdom life. In like manner, Matthew 13 does not cover the reigning and the ruling in the kingdom. Rather, it covers the appearance of the kingdom, including a great tree, the tares, and the leaven. But in Matthew 19:28 there is something further; that is, when the Lord Jesus comes to be the King, His apostles will be co-kings. This will not be merely the reality of the kingdom but the manifestation of the kingdom. From this we can see that there are three aspects of the kingdom—the reality, the appearance, and the manifestation of the kingdom. Matthew 20 also indicates the same thing. It indicates that during the time when the Lord reigns in His kingdom, some will sit with Him and reign with Him. This is not the reality or

the appearance of the kingdom but the manifestation of the kingdom. In the manifestation of the kingdom, some will reign with Him. This is confirmed by 2 Timothy 2:12, which says that we shall reign with Him.

Now we come to the last book of the New Testament, Revelation. Here we see the harvest. The seed of the kingdom was sown in Matthew, and the harvest is in the book of Revelation. In Matthew there is the seed of being co-kings with Christ, and in Revelation there is the harvest of being co-kings with Christ. All those faithful ones, the martyrs, will be raised up, resurrected, and will be co-kings with Christ ruling over the earth for a thousand years (20:4-6). This is surely not the appearance or the reality of the kingdom but the manifestation of the kingdom.

We all need to receive the gospel of the kingdom. We received the gospel of life and the gospel of grace, but we also must receive the gospel of the kingdom. One day the kingdom will be manifested. Whether we will be included or shut out of that manifestation is not a small thing. We all need to repent and consecrate ourselves to deal with this matter of the kingdom.

CHAPTER THIRTY-EIGHT

THE MANIFESTATION OF THE KINGDOM (3)

Scripture Reading: Matt. 16:27; 2 Cor. 5:9-10; 1 Cor. 4:5; 3:12-15; 9:24-27; 2 Tim. 4:6-8; 1 Pet. 5:4; Rev. 22:12

All the verses in the Scripture Reading are related to three things: the second coming of the Lord Jesus, the manifestation of the kingdom, and the matter of receiving a reward or suffering a loss. Many Christians like to talk about the second coming of the Lord Jesus and also about the coming of God's kingdom. Unfortunately, many times they talk about these things according to their concepts, not according to the pure word in the Holy Scriptures. While they may speak something concerning the second coming and also something concerning the kingdom, they seldom speak something concerning the saints receiving a reward or suffering a loss. If, however, we come back to the pure Word, we will see that the above verses are the development of Matthew 16:27. In Matthew 16 there is a little seed: "The Son of Man is to come in the glory of His Father with His angels, and then He will repay each man according to his doings." From reading the pure word in the Scriptures, we can see something of the Lord's revelation and also of His concept.

Matthew 16:27 does not say that when the Son of Man comes in the glory of His Father, He will save everyone who believes in Him. Rather, it says that He will repay each man according to his doings. It does not say according to his faith but according to his doings. Justification is by faith, not by works. We are not saved by works but by our faith (Eph. 2:8-9). Matthew 16:27 does not relate to the matter of salvation but to the matter of reward. I am afraid that many Christians do not have this word *reward* in their Christian dictionary. We must be strongly impressed that when the Lord Jesus comes back, He will reward every man according to his doings.

THE REWARD

The reward is not a mansion in the sky. Again, we must consider the pure word of the Bible. To the prudent virgins the reward is the enjoyment of the wedding feast. To the faithful slaves the reward is the joy of the Lord and the

ruling and authority over the nations. Do you have the assurance that when the Lord Jesus comes, you will be rewarded? You may be so happy that the Lord Jesus is coming and that you are going to meet Him, but when you meet Him, will He reward you? I am fearful that when the Lord comes we will not be rewarded but exposed. The reward will be based upon our doings. How we live, walk, function, and work for the Lord after we are saved is the ground for the Lord to reward us. This concept is sown as a seed in Matthew 16:27.

Let us now read 2 Corinthians 5:9-10. In these verses the seed that was sown in Matthew 16 blossoms: "Therefore also we are determined, whether at home or abroad, to gain the honor of being well pleasing to Him. For we must all be manifested before the judgment seat of Christ, that each one may receive the things done through the body according to what he has practiced, whether good or bad." In order to be well pleasing to the Lord, we must have an ambition to please the Lord. This is not an ambition to go to a heavenly mansion. No! These verses do not mention a heavenly mansion but rather the judgment seat of Christ. They do not say that we will appear before the judgment seat to receive our salvation. Rather, they say that we will receive something according to the things done through our body. If we have done something good, we will receive a reward. If we have done something bad, we will receive a kind of punishment.

Some might argue that because the Lord's redemption is complete, that He died for them, they have no need to suffer any punishment. According to their concept, it is simply a matter of being saved or of perishing. If they are saved, one day they will go to heaven. If they are lost, one day they will go to hell. This is the shortsighted and mistaken concept of many Christians today.

We must come back to the pure Word of God. Second Corinthians 5:9-10 says that we must all be manifested before the judgment seat of Christ. It does not say that we must be manifested before the throne of grace. Some have mistakenly thought that the judgment seat of Christ referred to in 2 Corinthians is the same as the great white throne in Revelation 20. This is wrong. The great white throne is for the judgment of the unbelievers who are raised up after the millennium. The judgment at the white throne will not be for a reward but to determine who is saved and who will perish. That judgment relates to eternal perdition. The judgment seat of Christ mentioned in 2 Corinthians is not for the unbelievers but for the believers. It is not to decide whether they are saved or lost but to decide whether they should

receive a reward or suffer a loss. The word *loss* is actually a weak word here. It is better to say *punishment*, or, according to Hebrews 12, *discipline*.

Many fundamental Christians do not like to consider that a Christian could be punished or disciplined at the Lord's coming. Even those who admit that Christians need some discipline from the Lord consider that it occurs only in this age and not in the next. However, I cannot find one verse in the New Testament which indicates that God's discipline of His children is only in this age and not in the next. On the contrary, some verses indicate that after the Lord comes back, He will deal with His children. For example, Luke 12:46-47 says, "The master of that slave will come on a day when he does not expect him and at an hour which he does not know, and will cut him asunder, and will appoint his portion with the unbelievers. And that slave who knew his master's will and did not prepare or do according to his will, will receive many lashes." These verses show that not only during this age but also after the Lord comes back, He will still deal with His children.

Some Christians think that after they die or after the Lord comes back, the possibility of punishment or discipline will be past. They think to die is to graduate from the punishment. They must drop their concept and come back to the pure Word. They need to read 2 Corinthians 5:9-10 once more. Some may think that because the Lord is merciful and gracious, He will forgive them at that time. They may think that they can pray and repent at that time and everything will be fine. This means that they do not know the Lord's dispensation. Today is the age of the Lord's forgiveness. Once the Lord comes back, the age or dispensation of forgiveness will be over. At that time it will be too late to repent. Today if you repent and if you confess your sins, surely the Lord will forgive you. However, if you do not repent and confess today but wait until that day when you stand before the judgment seat, it will be too late. You may try to repent and confess then, but the Lord will tell you that the dispensation, the time for repenting and confessing, is over.

The same principle applies to unbelievers. Today is the age of grace. Any unbeliever may repent and confess to the Lord to receive salvation. But when the Lord Jesus comes back, no one will be saved by repenting and confessing, because at that time it will be too late. Zechariah 12:10-14 refers to the repenting Jews at the Lord's coming back. Now is the time for all of us to repent, to confess our failures and wrongdoings. Today if we repent and confess, applying the Lord's precious blood, surely He will forgive us. But not

at that time. When we stand before the judgment seat of Christ, the dispensation of forgiveness will be over. Because the time of forgiveness will be past, you will have to suffer some punishment. Whether you call that suffering a loss or discipline or the Lord's dealing or punishment matters little. The terminology means nothing. The fact is that you have to reckon with 2 Corinthians 5:10 concerning the judgment seat of Christ.

First Corinthians 4:5 says, "Do not judge anything before the time, until the Lord comes, who will both bring to light the hidden things of darkness and make manifest the counsels of the hearts, and then there will be praise to each from God." This verse also indicates that at the time of the Lord's coming back He will judge His children. At that time He will judge not only the outward things but also the inward motives. He will bring into light all the hidden things, and He will reveal whatever is concealed in your heart. At that time you will either receive a reward or a kind of dealing from the Lord.

PROVED BY FIRE

Now we come to 1 Corinthians 3:12-15. These verses are very clear. "If anyone builds upon the foundation gold, silver, precious stones, wood, grass, stubble, the work of each will become manifest; for the day will declare it, because it is revealed by fire, and the fire itself will prove each one's work, of what sort it is. If anyone's work which he has built upon the foundation remains, he will receive a reward; if anyone's work is consumed, he will suffer loss, but he himself will be saved, yet so as through fire.'' These verses tell us that all our works will be proved by fire. If we build with gold, silver, and precious stones, they will remain. If we build with wood, grass, and stubble, they will be consumed by the fire. If our work abides at that time, we shall receive a reward. It does not say that we shall receive salvation but a reward. In addition to our salvation, we shall receive a reward. Furthermore, it does not say that if a man's work is consumed, he will perish. It says that he will suffer loss. To suffer loss does not mean to perish. The last part of the verse says that he himself will be saved. Do not comfort yourself, however, by saying that as long as you are saved, you are okay. Do not neglect the words *as through fire*. What do the words *as through fire* mean? I do not know, but I do know that the pure word of the Scripture says that we shall be saved "as through fire" at the Lord's coming back. Certainly this will not be a pleasant experience.

Do not think that these verses in 1 Corinthians apply to the Jews or that this is a dispensational matter which does not apply to the believers in Christ. Please remember this was a letter written to the Gentile believers in the city of Corinth, which was a city in Greece. This was a letter written to those who call upon the name of the Lord Jesus in every place (1:2). This means that this letter is also written to us. We must take heed to this word. After we have been saved, we will never lose our salvation. Once God gives you salvation, it is eternal. The suffering of loss does not refer to losing salvation. Our God is not so simple. Even parents in dealing with their children are not so simple. When the children are good, they may give them some good things as a reward. When they are bad, they may punish them. If even earthly parents have this kind of wisdom, how much more wisdom does our heavenly Father have!

RECEIVING THE PRIZE

First Corinthians 9:24-27 continues the same concept. “Do you not know that those who run on a racecourse all run, but one receives the prize? Run in this way, that you may lay hold. And everyone who contends exercises self-control in all things; they then, that they may receive a corruptible crown, but we, an incorruptible. I therefore run in this way, not as though without a clear aim; I box in this way, not as though beating the air; but I buffet my body and make it my slave, lest perhaps having preached to others, I myself may become disapproved.” In these verses Paul says that he feared he would become disapproved. Does this mean that he feared he might perish? No! This simply means that he feared he might lose the prize, the crown. Because of his fear, he exercised discipline to keep his body under subjection. The word *disapproved* actually means to be rejected. This means to be rejected from the prize, not from salvation. After we have been saved, we have to run the race properly, and we have to fight the battle in the right way.

A CROWN OF RIGHTEOUSNESS

Near the end of Paul’s life, just before he was martyred, he had the assurance that he would receive the reward. “I am already being poured out, and the time of my departure is at hand. I have fought the good fight; I have finished the course; I have kept the faith. Henceforth there is laid up for me the crown of righteousness, with which the Lord, the righteous Judge, will recompense me in that day, and not only me but also all those who have loved

His appearing" (2 Tim. 4:6-8). Paul said that he was already being poured out. This means he was ready to be offered to God as a martyr. He realized that the time of his departure was at hand, and he had the assurance that he had fought the good fight and had finished his course. In 1 Corinthians 9 he said that he was running the race, but in 2 Timothy he said that he had finished his course. Because he had kept the faith and had run the race, he had the assurance that there was laid up for him not eternal security, nor a crown of grace, but a crown of righteousness. He was assured that the Lord Jesus as the righteous Judge would give him the crown of righteousness in that day. He went on to say that the Lord Jesus would also give such a crown to all those who have loved His appearing. In these verses Paul does not consider the Lord as the gracious Judge but as the righteous Judge. The crown of righteousness has nothing to do with our salvation. Our salvation has been settled once and for all, even unto eternity. But whether or not we will receive a crown of righteousness as a prize depends upon how we run the race.

A CROWN OF GLORY

The apostle Peter also had the same concept. In 1 Peter 5:4 he says, "When the Chief Shepherd is manifested, you will receive the unfading crown of glory." The crown of glory is something in addition to salvation. We have received salvation. But whether or not we will receive a crown of glory depends upon how we conduct ourselves and how we work for Him.

The harvest of the seed of the reward is in Revelation 22:12. "Behold, I come quickly, and My reward is with Me to render to each one as his work is." The seed was sown in Matthew 16; it grew and blossomed in the Epistles, and now it is harvested in Revelation 22:12. The Lord Jesus said that He was coming not with salvation but with a reward. Do not think that if you die or if the Lord comes back all your problems will be solved. If you have not learned the proper lessons and if you have not matured in the Lord, you will still have problems, and the Lord will deal with you. If you do not feed on the Lord today and let Him saturate you, you will have problems when the Lord comes back; He will deal with you. You must be matured and learn the lessons either before you die or after you are resurrected. Whether you learn today or you learn in that day is up to you. If you learn the lessons today and you mature in the Lord today, you will be qualified to enter into the manifestation of the kingdom, the joy of the Lord. If you do not learn the lessons today, you will miss the manifestation of the kingdom because you will not be qualified to

enter. At that time you will still have to be matured, but it will be too late for entering into the manifestation of the kingdom. If a student does not study, he will not graduate. If he studies well, he will not only graduate but also receive a prize. In school if you do not pass your courses this semester, you must take the same courses next semester. Eventually, you must pass all the courses in order to graduate. I beg you to drop the concept that everything will be okay when you die, as long as you believe in the Lord Jesus. Do not think that by your death you will graduate. You still must be qualified.

According to the pure word of the Bible, we are told clearly that we must be saturated with the Lord, and we must be matured. If we are not matured and saturated in this age, we must be matured and saturated in the next. Although the Lord does not give us the details of how He will deal with us at that time, He does give us the clear principle. The principle is that after we are saved we must go along with Him, enjoy Him, be saturated with Him, and be matured in Him. If not, we can be sure that we will suffer something. We will miss something, and we will suffer something. But if we will cooperate with the Lord, when He returns, we will receive something in addition to our salvation as a prize. This will happen at the time of the manifestation of the kingdom, and this is a part of the manifestation of the kingdom. If we are not qualified, we will have no participation in the manifestation of the kingdom. If we would participate in the manifestation of the kingdom, we must live today in the reality of the kingdom. Only those who are living today in the reality of the kingdom will be transferred into the manifestation of the kingdom in that day. May the gracious Lord grant us to cooperate with Him, to let Him saturate us, so that when He comes back we may enter into the manifestation of the kingdom for the top enjoyment of Christ as a reward.

CHAPTER THIRTY-NINE

THE TRANSFER OF THE REALITY OF THE KINGDOM INTO ITS MANIFESTATION

Scripture Reading: Matt. 24:30; 13:39b-43; Rev. 14:1-5, 14-16; 3:10; 12:5-6; Exo. 23:19a; Lev. 23:22

When the Lord Jesus returns, He will reckon with all His servants. Those who have been faithful will be commended and rewarded, but those who have been unfaithful will suffer a loss and a punishment. What the unfaithful ones had received from the Lord will be taken from them and given to others. If we are not faithful to the Lord today, when He reckons with us at His coming back, we will lose what we received as a gift from Him; we will miss the wedding feast and the joy of reigning with the Lord as co-kings for a thousand years. In addition, we will experience some discipline, some punishment. This is according to the pure word of the Lord in the Scriptures. We all must take this as a clear and sober warning to be faithful to the indwelling Christ. If we abuse His grace today, we will suffer at His coming back.

We have already pointed out that the kingdom has three aspects: the reality, the appearance, and the manifestation. Now we need to see that the manifestation of the kingdom is simply the transfer of the reality of the kingdom. In the next age, the reality of the kingdom will become the manifestation of the kingdom.

What will happen to the appearance of the kingdom? At the time of the transfer of the reality of the kingdom into the manifestation of the kingdom, the appearance of the kingdom will be burned away. During this present age, the reality of the kingdom and the appearance of the kingdom progress at the same time. But when the Lord Jesus comes back, His angels will bind all the tares into bundles and cast them into the fire (Matt. 13:41-42). The tares will have done much damage to the Lord's kingdom, and He will be very angry and disgusted with them. Therefore, at His coming back He will deal first with the appearance of the kingdom by binding it and putting it into the fire. Then

He will transfer the reality of the kingdom into the next age to become the manifestation of the kingdom.

Now we need to see how the Lord will accomplish such a transfer. By referring once again to the chart in chapter 35, which shows the difference between the kingdom of the heavens and the kingdom of God, you can see that the kingdom of God is composed of six sections. Here we are dealing only with the fourth and fifth sections. In the innermost section of the fourth circle is the reality of the kingdom of the heavens. This circle is enclosed by another larger circle, which represents the appearance of the kingdom of the heavens. When the Lord Jesus comes back, He will bind the appearance of the kingdom of the heavens and throw it into the fire. That will terminate the appearance of the kingdom. While the fourth section, the appearance of the kingdom of the heavens, will be terminated, the reality of the kingdom will be transferred into the next section, the millennium. After being transferred there, the reality of the kingdom will become the manifestation of the kingdom.

REAL AND FALSE CHRISTIANS

The transfer of the reality of the kingdom into the manifestation of the kingdom will be accomplished by the rapture of the saints. Most Christians realize that at the end of this age the Lord Jesus will come back, and the believers will be raptured. At the time of the completion of the age, there will be two categories of Christians. There will be the real ones, the regenerated ones, and there will be the false ones, the tares. The false ones are the nominal Christians, those who are Christian in name only. These might be called the unbelieving "believers." Not only have they done much damage to the Lord's kingdom; they also have become an insult and blasphemy to the Lord Himself. These false Christians comprise the appearance of the kingdom, which will be burned up at the Lord's coming back.

OVERCOMING AND DEFEATED CHRISTIANS

Among the real and genuine Christians there will be a further classification. Some among these will be overcoming Christians, and others will be defeated Christians. They are real Christians, but they are defeated. They are real Christians, but their Christian life is a failure. However, the fact that it is a failure does not mean they are not real Christians. Surely they are real

Christians. Thus, when the Lord comes back, we may be either overcoming ones or defeated ones.

All the overcoming Christians are *in* the reality of the kingdom, and they *are* the reality of the kingdom. The defeated ones, although they are the church, the called ones, are not the chosen ones. Remember the Lord's word in Matthew 22:14: "Many are called but few are chosen." All those who are in the church have been called, but only those who are living in the reality of the kingdom will be chosen. When the Lord Jesus comes back, there will be these three kinds of Christians: the false Christians, the real and overcoming Christians, and the real but defeated Christians. May the Lord have mercy upon us so that we would be neither the false Christians nor the defeated Christians but the overcoming ones.

When the Lord Jesus returns, all the real Christians, both the overcoming ones and the defeated ones, will be gathered to the Lord. The Lord has a way to gather all of them, or in the words of the parable, a way to reap His crop. To reap, or gather, the wheat is to catch it away from the field. The Lord Jesus will take us away from the field, which is the world. This signifies that all those who are real believers will be taken away from the earth.

Matthew 13:30 reads: "Let both grow together until the harvest, and at the time of the harvest I will say to the reapers, Collect first the tares and bind them into bundles to burn them up, but the wheat gather into my barn." In this verse the Lord says that He will take the wheat into the barn. What and where is the barn? The Lord Jesus was really wise to use such a simple thing as farming to illustrate the mystery of the kingdom. We all know that the farmer does not live in the barn but in the house. The barn is neither in the field, nor is it the farmer's home. Rather, the barn is somewhere between the field and the home. It may be close to the home, but it is not the home. In this parable the world is signified by the field, and the third heaven is signified by the farmer's home. The home of the Lord Jesus is in the third heaven. What then is between the heavens and the world? The air is between them. First Thessalonians 4:17 says that those who are alive and remain will be caught up in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air. It does not say that they will meet the Lord on the earth or in the heavens but rather in the air. The air here corresponds to the barn in Matthew 13. When we come to these matters, we must exercise our discernment, and we must be alert. Do not be careless, thinking that to go into the third heaven is the same as to go into the air.

There is a great difference between the two, just as there is a great difference between the barn and the home of the farmer. The barn may be close to the home, but it is somewhere between the field and the farmer's home.

One day the Lord Jesus will come to the air sitting upon a cloud. Surely in the third heaven, where God dwells, there are no clouds. But in the air surrounding the earth, there are many clouds. "I saw, and behold, there was a white cloud, and on the cloud One like the Son of Man sitting, having a golden crown on His head and a sharp sickle in His hand. And another angel came out of the temple, crying with a loud voice to Him who sat on the cloud, Send forth Your sickle and reap, for the hour to reap has come because the harvest of the earth is ripe" (Rev. 14:14-15). Who is the One sitting upon the cloud? Surely it is the Lord Jesus Himself! And what is the sickle? This refers to the angels. The Lord Jesus will send forth His angels to bind the tares to be thrown into the fire and to gather all the wheat into the barn. Matthew 13 says that the wheat will be gathered into the barn, and 1 Thessalonians 4:17 says that we all will meet the Lord in the air.

THE FIRSTFRUITS

Before the harvest was reaped in Revelation 14:14, there had been a reaping already. Revelation 14:1 says, "I saw, and behold, the Lamb standing on Mount Zion, and with Him a hundred and forty-four thousand, having His name and the name of His Father written on their foreheads." According to Revelation 14:4, these are the firstfruits to God and to the Lamb. They are standing not in the air but upon the throne, upon Mount Zion. This refers to Mount Zion in the heavens where God dwells. Thus, the firstfruits went not to the air, that is, to the barn, but directly to the Father's home in the third heaven. The harvest, however, will go into the barn, into the air.

THE MAN-CHILD

Revelation 12:5 says, "She brought forth a son, a man-child, who is to shepherd all the nations with an iron rod; and her child was caught up to God and to His throne." The man-child, the overcomers, will not be caught up to the air but to the throne of God in the third heaven. The harvest goes to the air, which corresponds to the barn, but the firstfruits go to Mount Zion, to the throne of God, which corresponds to the farmer's home. The man-child is also raptured to the throne.

THE OLD TESTAMENT TYPE

The Old Testament presents a clear type of this principle in Exodus 23:19. There it says that the firstfruits of the ground shall be brought into the house of Jehovah your God. The firstfruits do not go into the barn but directly into God's house. This indicates that the firstfruits are for the satisfaction of the Father. By this we can see that the rapture of the Christians will not occur only at one time. First there is the rapture of the firstfruits, and then there is the rapture of the harvest. The firstfruits will be raptured to the third heaven, but the harvest will be raptured to the air.

THE TIME OF THE RAPTURE OF THE MAN-CHILD

According to Revelation 12:5-6, after the rapture of the man-child, that is, after the overcomers have been caught up to the third heaven, there will still be another thousand two hundred and sixty days or three and a half years. Most Bible students realize that these three and a half years will be the second half of the last week mentioned in Daniel 9. At the end of Daniel 9, there are seventy weeks. First, there are seven weeks plus sixty-two weeks, altogether sixty-nine weeks. Then eventually, there is the last week. A week here indicates seven years. This seven-year period is divided into two parts. The first part is of three and a half years, and the second part is of three and a half years. The three and a half years is mentioned both in Daniel and Revelation. Sometimes it is mentioned in this way: "a time and times and half a time" (Dan. 12:7). That means one year, two years, and half a year or three and a half years. At other times it is designated as forty-two months or a thousand two hundred and sixty days (Rev. 11:2-3; 12:6; 13:5). The three and a half years, the forty-two months, or the thousand two hundred and sixty days all refer to the same period of time.

The man-child will be raptured in the middle of the last week, which means that after his rapture there will be another three and a half years. This indicates that there is more than one rapture of the saints just as there is more than one reaping of the harvest. First, there will be the reaping of the firstfruits and then the reaping of the harvest. Surely the reaping of the firstfruits will be earlier, and the reaping of the harvest will be later.

According to Leviticus 23:22, there will be even a further reaping. After the reaping of the firstfruits and the reaping of the general harvest, some of the

grains will still not be ripe. These are the grains that are in the corners of the field and need more time to ripen under the hot sun. In Leviticus 23 these late-ripening ones are called gleanings.

In principle, God's harvest will also be gathered in three stages. Some will be gathered as the firstfruits, most will be gathered as the harvest, and a few will be left in the world as gleanings in the corners to be harvested at a later time, after the tribulation. This is a very serious matter. In a wheat field, the grains that ripen first are those nearer the center of the field, whereas the grains on the edges ripen last. They have to be left for a longer time in the field to be scourged and burned by the bright sun. Then they too will be ripened and ready to harvest. If we desire to ripen early, we need to be in the center of the church life. Do not stay on the edges of the church life. If you do, you may be left to ripen in the field.

THE NEED OF MATURITY

We are God's cultivated land (1 Cor. 3:9), and as God's cultivated land we may have at least three different stages of harvesting. Those who ripen early will be harvested first by the Lord and will be the overcomers as the firstfruits. These will be taken by the Lord to the throne of God in the third heaven for God's satisfaction. Most will be left in the field for another length of time to ripen before they are harvested. A few who are on the edge of the church life, in the corners of the field, will be left until the last. The type of this kind of harvest is found in Exodus 23 and Leviticus 23. The partial fulfillment is in Matthew 13, and the complete fulfillment is in Revelation 14. There we find the firstfruits and the harvest. According to the description in Revelation 14, the firstfruits are the saints who are saturated with the Lord Jesus. They are the ones who have been fully occupied with Christ and taken over by Christ until they are matured. My heart aches for many of the Lord's children who seem to be somewhat ignorant, careless, and dull concerning the need to be matured. How serious it is that we are God's cultivated land, God's crop! There is no doubt that we are wheat, but how mature are we? Will we be the firstfruits or the harvest or the gleanings? I beg you to take this word seriously and to bring this matter to the Lord. By such a reaping of God's crop, which we call the rapture, the Lord Jesus will transfer the reality of the kingdom into the manifestation of the kingdom. Matthew 13:43 says, "Then the righteous will shine forth like the sun in the kingdom of their Father. He who has ears to hear, let him hear." The righteous ones here are the overcomers. Those who

are living in the reality of the kingdom of the heavens today will be raptured and transferred into the Father's kingdom to become the shining ones there.

THE PRINCIPLES AS A WARNING

Do not be tempted to be curious concerning all the details of these matters. What the Lord reveals to us is a principle. The principle is that the Lord's crop, His wheat, needs to be matured. Those who are matured will be taken first. Then after the firstfruits will come the harvest. There is no need for us to figure out the time that the firstfruits will be taken away and the time that the harvest will be taken away. Do not try to understand the Bible in this way. The Lord reveals to us not the details but the principles. The details would require tens of thousands of pages to describe. We do not need the details, but we do need to pick up the help from the principles. So forget about your curiosity, but pick up the principles as a warning. We all need to pick up the warning and to realize that we need to be mature. We all need to pray, "Lord, have mercy upon me that I would be a part of the firstfruits and that I would be an overcomer."

Pray that you will be a prudent virgin. Pray that the Lord will save you from being a foolish virgin. Do not try to pick up the details. Rather, pick up some living, unveiling, revealing, stirring, and encouraging word from the Lord. Otherwise, you may be clear about some of the details but miss the rapture. You may miss being an overcomer although you are clear about some of the facts. Pick up the principle to receive the warning. Do not be ensnared by the desire to have the knowledge concerning the details. We need to see God's purpose and intention, and we need to see our responsibility to cooperate with Him. We need to enjoy Christ, to participate in Him, and to take Him in until we are matured. Eventually, He will be expressed as our wedding garment, and we will be qualified to be co-kings with Him. Do not take all these points in order to systematize the Bible. May the Lord preserve us so that we will simply care for the pure and real revelation of the principles as a warning.

CHAPTER FORTY

THE LORD'S DEALING WITH THE BELIEVERS AT HIS COMING BACK

Scripture Reading: Matt. 24:39b-44; 1 Thes. 4:15-17; 1 Cor. 15:50-54; 2 Thes. 2:1-4, 8; 1:5-10; Phil. 3:20-21; 1 John 3:2; Rev. 2:25; 3:3; 16:15; 19:11-16; 22:7, 12

All the verses in the Scripture Reading reveal how the Lord will deal with the believers at His coming back. The way will be by judgment, by rapture, and by choosing.

The rapture of the believers is likened to the harvesting of wheat. According to this picture, the rapture is not something that can be accomplished all at one time. In ancient times the harvest of the wheat was done in three stages: the firstfruits were gathered, the general harvest was gathered, and then the gleanings were gathered. According to this illustration, we can also see that the rapture is not something which will occur as an accident. Rather, it comes as the result of the maturity of life. If we are not mature in the Lord Jesus, surely we will not be reaped. As the Lord's crop of wheat on the earth, we need to be ripe, to be mature. Why has the Lord delayed His coming for such a long time? It is because of the lack of adequate maturity among His saints. Our progress and maturity determine the speed of His coming. If we mature faster, surely His coming will be sooner. In a sense, we are not waiting for His coming; rather, He is waiting for us to be fully matured. We need the maturity of life.

How can we be transferred from the reality of the kingdom into the manifestation of the kingdom? It is only by the growth of life and maturity of life. To use our illustration once more, the crop can be transferred into the barn only by growing and becoming ripe. Once the crop is ripe, it will be transferred into the barn. We all need the maturity. The proper maturity will issue in the transfer.

THE GLORIFICATION OF OUR BODY

At the time of the transfer, there will also be the need of a kind of work by the Lord. Philippians 3:20-21 tells us that at His coming back He will transfigure our body, conforming it "to the body of His glory." We have been regenerated in our spirit, and we are under the process of transformation in our soul. When the transformation has been completed, we will have the maturity of life. This means that we will be ready to be reaped by the Lord Jesus, and He will come to change our body. This is the point that must be worked out by the Lord. Suppose that you are a mature saint, regenerated in your spirit and transformed in your soul. You have been fully saturated and possessed by the Lord Jesus. What more do you need? You need to have your body transfigured.

We may use the apostle Paul for an example. As a saint who died in the Lord, he is sleeping until the time of his resurrection. While he was living on the earth, his spirit was fully occupied by the Lord, and his soul was fully saturated and occupied by the Lord. But today he is under the earth waiting for the transfiguration of his body. His body is still something old, something of the old creation. Although his spirit was regenerated and his soul was transformed, his dead body remains in the old creation. When the Lord Jesus comes back, He will change the bodies of both the living saints and dead saints. Both the living ones and dead ones will be transfigured. The Lord will do a work of transfiguration upon our bodies.

The application of the Lord's power to our bodies is, in a sense, the rapture. When the Lord Jesus will catch us away into the air, He will not only move us positionally from the earth to the air, but He will also change our vile bodies into glorious ones. Our vile bodies may be likened to ugly worms and our changed bodies to beautiful butterflies. Do not ask me what kind of glorious bodies we shall have. I do not know. But I do know that this vile body will be changed into a glorious one. I do know that our bodies will be like His resurrected body. After the Lord Jesus was crucified, buried, and resurrected, His physical body, the flesh, was transfigured into something that was still physical, yet mysterious and glorious.

At His coming back this troublesome physical body will be transfigured into a wonderful, mysterious, and beautiful body. At that time it will no longer be ugly. Both the brothers and sisters will be so pretty. At that time we will be as pretty and glorious as the Lord Jesus was after He was resurrected. That glory will be simply the Lord Himself. Christ within us is the hope of glory (Col.

1:27). He Himself is the glory. When He comes back, He will be glorified in us. This means that His glory will come out of us. Today the glory of Christ is hidden and concealed in our spirit and even confined within our soul. But at His coming back His glory will spread from within and saturate our whole body. This saturating of our body with the indwelling glory of the Lord Jesus will be the changing of our body. Do not think that the Lord Jesus will simply come from the heavens to change your body and catch you away. It will not occur in that way. Rather, the Lord Jesus will transfigure your body from within. He has already entered into your spirit and has begun to transform your soul. But there is one part of you which He has not yet saturated; that is your physical body. When He comes back, He will saturate your body and be glorified in you. This is the rapture. The rapture is not merely a kind of catching away into the air but a catching away with the transfiguration of the body. At the time He comes to catch us away, He will also come out of us and swallow up this body of death. Our body is subject not only to illness and disease but also to death. The Bible even calls it a body of death (Rom. 7:24). At the Lord's coming back this body of death will be swallowed up with life. According to 1 Corinthians 15:50-54, our physical body of flesh and blood cannot inherit the kingdom. To inherit the kingdom we need another kind of body, a glorified body. Our body must be transfigured by being swallowed up by the Lord's life. Today the Lord within us is our life and our glory. One day this life will swallow up our body of death. Our whole body will be saturated, fully possessed, and fully transfigured by the Lord Jesus as our life and glory.

Many Christians consider that the rapture will occur as a kind of accident and a great surprise. Their thought is that while we are working here on the earth, suddenly the Lord will come back and snatch us away to the heavens. They would exhort people not to go to the movies lest, when the Lord Jesus comes to snatch them away, He find them there. Rather, they would encourage people to be praying and reading the Bible and worshipping the Lord. This thought neglects the subjective side of the rapture—that the Lord Jesus will come out of the spirit and the soul to swallow up the body. This is the meaning of 1 Corinthians 15:50-54, which says that death has been swallowed up unto victory. He will be glorified from within us. He will do two things at once: while He is taking us away to the air, He will come from within us to swallow up our bodies. Then we will be changed! Our bodies will be transfigured, and we will be fully and absolutely the same as He is (1 John 3:2). Inwardly and outwardly we will match Him.

THE PRINCIPLE OF THE HARVEST

Other Christians consider that the rapture will occur with all Christians simultaneously. They think that when the Lord Jesus comes back, all the real believers will be taken suddenly from the earth into the air at the same time. This concept fully neglects the principle of the harvest. The principle of the harvest is that fruit is harvested as it becomes ripe. Some of the crop ripens first and is reaped as the firstfruits. This is a minority. Then comes the harvest of the majority of the crop. Finally, comes the reaping of the gleanings, or the remainder. These are at least three different stages of harvest. This picture in the Bible is an exceedingly clear type. In kindergarten classes many pictures are used to teach the little ones. In the same manner the Lord uses the picture of the harvest to clearly portray the matter of the rapture. If we only pick up the clear words in the New Testament, we may not understand the rapture so well; but if we look at the pictures, it is very clear. We have a clear picture of the rapture of the believers in the type of the reaping of the harvest. This is a type in the Old Testament, and it is fulfilled in the New Testament. In Matthew 13 there is the harvest, and in Revelation 14 there are both the firstfruits and the major part of the harvest. Eventually, the major part of the crop will become mature, and the harvest time will come. Very close to this time, a few will become mature early. They will become the firstfruits. The major part will then ripen later and will be the general harvest. However, some who are at the corner or the edges of the field will still be green and need a further time to become mature. These are the gleanings or the remainder.

Why has the harvest time of the Lord not yet come? According to the situation today, there is hardly any possibility for the Lord Jesus to come back because the major part of the crop is still green and not ripe. We need to be desperate with the Lord to be saturated and to be matured. When the major part of the crop is ripe and ready for the harvest, that will be the time for the Lord Jesus to come and reap. Just before this reaping, some who are matured early will be reaped as the firstfruits.

It is very clear, from Matthew to Revelation, that the New Testament teaches that the rapture will occur not merely once but several times. The rapture of the firstfruits will be a short while before the tribulation. The tribulation will be mainly a period of seven years. In the book of Revelation there are seven seals, and the last of the seven seals consists of seven

trumpets. The last of the seven trumpets will be sounded quite close to the end of the tribulation. By reading Revelation carefully, we can realize that the great tribulation will probably begin from the first trumpet. It will not begin from the time of the first seal. The first seal has nearly been fulfilled already. The second, third, and fourth seals have begun to be fulfilled and are still being fulfilled. Once these four seals are completed, the fifth and sixth seals will come, and after these are finished, the seventh seal will come. The seven trumpets are the content and the totality of the seventh seal. Remember that the great tribulation will begin with the first trumpet and will continue until the last trumpet.

With this in mind we need to read 1 Thessalonians 4:15: "This we say to you by the word of the Lord, that we who are living, who are left remaining unto the coming of the Lord, shall by no means precede those who have fallen asleep." This means that the dead believers will be resurrected first, and then the living believers will be raptured. It is not that we will be raptured first and then the dead ones will be resurrected. When will this occur? Verse 16 says, "The Lord Himself, with a shout of command, with the voice of the archangel and with the trumpet of God, will descend from heaven, and the dead in Christ will rise first." The time that we will be raptured will be at the trumpet of God. Is this at the time of the first trumpet or of another trumpet? To answer this question we must read 1 Corinthians 15:52: "In a moment, in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trumpet; for the trumpet will sound, and the dead will be raised incorruptible, and we will be changed." This verse clearly says that we will be changed at the last trumpet. It also says that the dead will be raised at the last trumpet. This last trumpet is no doubt the seventh trumpet. All the dead believers will be resurrected, and all the living believers will be raptured at the seventh trumpet. The last trumpet, of course, is sounded very close to the end of the tribulation. This strongly indicates that not all the believers will be raptured before the tribulation.

A further indication of this fact is found in 2 Thessalonians 2:1-5. Verse 3 says, "Let no one deceive you in any way, because it will not come unless the apostasy comes first and the man of lawlessness is revealed, the son of perdition." The "son of perdition" is the Antichrist. *It* refers to the day of the Lord's coming. This verse tells us that the day of the Lord's coming cannot occur unless the Antichrist comes first. Our gathering together to the Lord cannot precede the appearance of the man of lawlessness, the Antichrist. These two points, the time of the seventh trumpet and the appearing of the

man of lawlessness, prove that not all the Christians will be raptured before the tribulation.

However, this does not mean that all the Christians will be here at the time of 1 Thessalonians 4 and 1 Corinthians 15. The exceptions are the firstfruits, which are taken away beforehand. This is seen in Matthew 24, where two are working in a field, but one is taken and one is left. Two are grinding at home, but one is taken and one is left. This is a parable which indicates that two Christians are there working together. One will be raptured, and the other will be left. This is the pure word of the Bible. Some of the saints who will be matured prior to others will be taken away. When they are taken away, it will be like precious things being stolen. Revelation 3:3 indicates that the Lord will come as a thief to steal something. When we are not aware of Him, He will come, not to steal junk but precious things. Only those who are matured in life and transformed in soul will be precious enough for the Lord to steal.

THE HOUR OF TRIAL

Revelation 3:10 says, "Because you have kept the word of My endurance, I also will keep you out of the hour of trial, which is about to come on the whole inhabited earth, to try them who dwell on the earth." No doubt, the trials that will come to try all the inhabitants on the earth will be the tribulation. In this verse the Lord Jesus promised that the church in Philadelphia would be preserved from the period of tribulation. This indicates that before the period of tribulation begins, the Lord will take them away from the earth. This is a rapture before the tribulation. To say, however, that the whole church will be raptured before the tribulation has no scriptural ground. This verse tells us that the overcomers, such as the church in Philadelphia, will be taken from the earth before the time of tribulation and kept from the hour of trial.

If some seeking ones are taken away before the tribulation and you are left, what will be your attitude? Will you still love the world? The tribulation will be full of all kinds of sufferings and troubles. From at least three directions the damages and sufferings will come to mankind. They will come from God, from man, and from Satan. At that time God will exercise His judgment over the heavens and over the earth. Because of God's judgment, much natural phenomena will be changed. The sun will become dark; the earth will be shaken with earthquakes; rains and floods will come. In Matthew 7:24-27 the Lord Jesus said that the rain would descend, that the rivers would come, and

that the winds would blow. The rain descending signifies testing from God; the river rising signifies testing from man; and the winds blowing signify testing from Satan, because Satan is in the air. That trial in Matthew 7 is a little miniature of the tribulation to come.

A great part of the coming tribulation will be the phenomenal changes in the earth and the heavens. These changes will be from God; God will shake the earth. The sun which has been so pleasant will become an enemy, and the moon will be darkened. There will also be the trials from man. The Antichrist and all his army will persecute anyone who is related to God. The Jews and the Christians will all suffer persecution from the Antichrist and his army. In addition to this, Revelation 12 tells us that Satan will damage the earth with great wrath.

If you are on the earth at that time during all these trials, and you realize that some of the believers have been taken by the Lord, what will you do? You are the Lord's crop, but you are not ripe and ready for harvesting. The tribulation will be like the hot sun to dry all the water of the world out of you and to mature you and make you ready to be harvested. Surely the believers at that time will be ripened quickly! Perhaps within the first few years a good number of Christians will be matured. They will be so clear at that time that they should not love their education, their jobs, or their homes. They will be so clear that they need to love the Lord and to eat of Christ, not only three times a day but perhaps ten times a day.

THE LORD'S COMING

The New Testament uses several different words to describe the Lord's coming. One is the ordinary word for *coming*. Another is a special Greek word, *parousia*. *Parousia* means "the Lord's presence." This word *parousia* is used in Matthew 24:39 and 44. The Lord's presence, or parousia, is His gradual coming and begins from the third heaven. When the firstfruits are taken into the house of God in Revelation 14, the Lord's parousia will begin.

Many years ago, with Brother Watchman Nee's help, we published several papers on the matter of the rapture. According to our study, we realized that the Lord's presence, His parousia, will begin from the time that the firstfruits are brought up to the third heaven. At that time, in a sense, the Lord will not have left the third heaven, but His parousia will begin. The parousia of the

Lord will last at least three and a half years. By studying all the verses that use this word *parousia*, we can see that the parousia of the Lord is a long-term matter. It begins from the time that the firstfruits are brought into the heavens, and it will continue until the Lord appears physically to the world. The firstfruits will be taken away before the tribulation, and the Lord's appearance to the earth in a physical way will be after the tribulation or at least at the ending of the tribulation. As the firstfruits, the mature ones will be taken up to the third heaven. Then they will come back with the Lord to the air. Then the majority of the Christians as the harvest will be reaped and caught up to the air where the Lord Jesus will exercise His judgment at the judgment seat of Christ. This is not the judgment at the great white throne, which will occur after the millennium (20:11-13). The judgment at the great white throne will be upon the unbelievers related to salvation, whereas the judgment at the judgment seat of Christ will be upon believers related to reward and punishment. At His judgment seat Christ will determine who among the believers will be rewarded and qualified to come with Him to the earth to defeat His enemy. At that time the Antichrist with his army will be on the earth fighting against the Lord and the Lord's people. Then the Lord will come with His army, the overcoming saints. After the rapture and after the judgment seat, the Lord will choose all the overcomers to come with Him to fight against the Antichrist (19:11-16).

A COMPLETE PICTURE

This is the rapture as revealed in the New Testament. Some Christians would argue for a pretribulation rapture, and others would argue for a posttribulation rapture. Why do they argue? It is because they each have seen only a part of the whole picture. Those who have seen something related to the pretribulation rapture hang on to that, and those who have seen something of the posttribulation rapture cling to that. We must realize, though, that the matter of the rapture is like so many pieces of a jigsaw puzzle. We should not cling to one piece, but put all the pieces together until we have a complete picture. Then the picture will make sense and be quite logical.

At harvest time in a field there are surely the firstfruits, the harvest, and the remainder or the gleanings. The rapture of a small number of mature saints will occur before the tribulation. The majority will be raptured during the tribulation because they need the tribulation to cause them to mature. Finally, the last of the crop will be harvested after the tribulation. The harvest of the

crop is not in chapters 7 or 8 of Revelation but in chapter 14. This means that it occurs in the midst of the tribulation.

Now let us read Revelation 16:13-15: "I saw, out of the mouth of the dragon and out of the mouth of the beast and out of the mouth of the false prophet, three unclean spirits as frogs; for they are spirits of demons doing signs, which go forth to the kings of the whole inhabited earth to gather them to the war of the great day of God the Almighty. (Behold, I come as a thief. Blessed is he who watches and keeps his garments that he may not walk naked and they see his shame.)" We need to note at which point in time the Lord said, "I come as a thief." It is at the time that the three evil spirits go forth to collect the army of the Antichrist to Armageddon. For the Lord to say, "Behold, I come as a thief," indicates that some believers are still left on the earth even at that time. This means that they have not yet been matured and are still on the earth under the bright sun to hasten their maturing. To say that all the believers will be raptured at one time before the tribulation or after the tribulation is absolutely unscriptural. The warning of the Lord to His people given in chapter 16 is very close to the end of the tribulation. This indicates that some of His people will be left on the earth during the tribulation.

According to all these verses, we can see that the rapture of the believers will not be accomplished all at one time but rather during a period of about seven years. When will you be raptured during that seven-year period? It depends on the degree of your maturity. If in the Lord's eyes you are mature and ripe, surely He will take you away before the tribulation begins. This is the way the Lord will use to transfer the reality of the kingdom into the manifestation of the kingdom. In other words, we all must be matured. If we desire to be matured, we must take Christ in again and again, eating of Him, and allowing Him to saturate us all the time. This is the kingdom life that is described and defined in Matthew 5, 6, and 7, a life that is always taking Christ as its nourishment. It is always being saturated, occupied, and possessed by Christ. This is the reality of the kingdom. This is real maturity. If this is our case, when the Lord Jesus comes back, we will be taken as the firstfruits. This means that we will be chosen and selected by Him to be in His army (Rev. 17:14; 19:11-15). The fighting army of the Lord Jesus is composed of the overcoming saints who are living in the reality of the kingdom. They are living in the reality of the kingdom; they will become the fighting army, and after the fighting, they will be the manifestation of the kingdom. As His army they will come with the Lord Jesus to destroy the Antichrist and his army.

Then the nations of the earth will become the kingdom of Christ, and the army composed of all the overcoming saints will become co-kings with Him to rule over the earth. They will be transferred into the manifestation of the kingdom during the millennium.

THE DEFEATED CHRISTIANS

What then will happen to all the defeated Christians? They will have no share in reigning as co-kings with Christ during the millennium. Where shall they be? While we do not know the details, the principle is clear. When the Lord Jesus returns, the false believers will be bound into bundles and cast into the fire, terminating all the tares in Christianity. The overcoming ones will be chosen to fight the battle with the Lord to recover the earth for the Lord's reigning. They will be the co-kings with Christ in the manifestation of the kingdom. The defeated Christians will be neither burned up nor enter into the kingdom to reign with Christ. According to Matthew 22:13 and 25:30, these will be cast into the outer darkness where there will be the weeping and the gnashing of teeth.

In summary, today's Christendom is composed of both false Christians and real Christians. The false Christians are the outward appearance of the kingdom. Among the real Christians, a few are the overcoming ones, and most are the defeated ones. When the Lord Jesus returns, He will first terminate the false Christians, burning up all the false Christians, the tares. Then He will take up all the real ones into the air according to their maturity. At His judgment seat in the air, He will exercise His judgment over all the real Christians to decide who will be selected and chosen. Those will be the overcomers who will return to the earth and fight against the rebellious army of Antichrist. After defeating Antichrist and his army, the overcomers will be Christ's co-kings, reigning with Him in His kingdom on the earth. That will be the manifestation of the kingdom. That also will be the transfer of the reality of the kingdom into the manifestation of the kingdom. Only the overcomers, those who are living in the reality of the kingdom of the heavens today, will have a share in its manifestation. The manifestation of the kingdom of the heavens will be a reward or prize given to the overcomers.

CHAPTER FORTY-ONE

THE LORD'S DEALING WITH THE GENTILES AND THE JEWS AT HIS COMING BACK

Scripture Reading: Joel 3:2, 9, 11-12; Zech. 12:2-4, 9-10; 14:12-13, 3-4; Dan. 2:34-35, 44-45a; Rev. 14:17-20; Isa. 63:1-6; Rev. 16:12-16; 17:12-14; 19:11-21; 2 Thes. 2:8; Rev. 11:15; Rom. 11:25-26; Jer. 3:17; Isa. 11:10; 2:2-4a; Zech. 8:20-23; 14:16-19

Mankind, according to 1 Corinthians 10:32, is divided into three groups of people: the Jews, the Gentiles, and the church. The church is composed of the regenerated persons who are saved and separated from the world. Among the Christians, some are overcomers, but many are not. The overcomers will have been fully transformed by the time the Lord comes back. Because they have been living in the present reality of the kingdom, they will be transferred into the manifestation of the kingdom to enjoy the marriage feast and reign with Christ in the millennium.

Many Christians, however, will not have been transformed by that time. They will have to be dealt with during the time of the millennium so that they also can be transformed. Such defeated Christians will have to settle their accounts with the Lord. They will suffer a loss and a kind of punishment from the Lord. The false Christians, the tares, will be bound and thrown into the fire.

THE GENTILES

Now we need to see how the Lord will deal with the nations, the peoples, and the Jews at His second coming. Let us read Joel 3:2: "I will gather all the nations / And will bring them down to the valley of Jehoshaphat; / And I will enter into judgment with them there / Because of My people and My inheritance Israel, / Whom they have scattered among the nations. / And they have divided My land." This verse indicates that the Lord Jesus will gather all the nations and bring them down. This will include even the armies of the Antichrist in the future. Verses 9 and 12 go on to say, "Proclaim this among

the nations: / Prepare the battle; / Rouse the mighty men; / Let all the men of battle / Draw near; let them go up / ...Let the nations rouse themselves and come up / To the valley of Jehoshaphat. / For there I will sit to judge / All the surrounding nations." These verses indicate that, at the time of the Lord's coming back, the nations will be stirred up to attack Jerusalem. According to their realization, they will gather to attack Jerusalem, but in God's purpose they will be gathered there to be judged. Zechariah 12:2-4 says, "I am about to make Jerusalem a cup of reeling to all the surrounding peoples; and when what happens in siege is upon Jerusalem, it will be upon Judah as well. And in that day I will make Jerusalem a burdensome stone to all the peoples; all who burden themselves with her will be cut up. Indeed all the nations of the earth will be gathered against her. In that day, declares Jehovah, I will strike every horse with bewilderment and its rider with madness; and I will open My eyes upon the house of Judah and will strike every horse of the peoples with blindness." These verses also show us that when the Lord Jesus comes back, the nations will be gathered to attack Jerusalem. At that time the Lord Jesus will come down from the air to defeat and destroy them. At the same time a wonderful and gracious thing will also occur. This is covered in verse 10: "I will pour out on the house of David and on the inhabitants of Jerusalem the Spirit of grace and of supplications; and they will look upon Me, whom they have pierced; and they will wail over Him with wailing as for an only son and cry bitterly over Him with bitter crying as for a firstborn son."

The Lord Jesus will return at the very time Antichrist will have gathered all his armies to attack Jerusalem. The Jews will be under siege by the armies of the Antichrist and will have no way of escape. But the Lord Jesus will appear, smite all the besieging armies, and pour out His Spirit upon the Jewish people. All the house of Judah will repent and mourn, weeping because of their rebellion against Christ. They will realize that He was the One whom they crucified and pierced on the cross. They will repent and receive Him as their Savior. Thus, by His descending, the Lord Jesus will accomplish two things: He will smite all the armies of the nations, and He will deliver all the repenting and believing Jewish people. According to Zechariah 14:3-4, when the Lord Jesus returns to rescue the Jewish people, His feet will stand on the Mount of Olives. When the Lord Jesus was ascending, the angel told His disciples, "This Jesus, who has been taken up from you into heaven, will come in the same way as you beheld Him going into heaven" (Acts 1:11). Since He ascended from the Mount of Olives, He will also return to the Mount of Olives.

When the Lord Jesus stands with His feet on the Mount of Olives, the mountain will be split, and a highway will be opened for the besieged Jewish people to escape. If you are an overcomer, you will be there with the Lord.

Smiting the Nations

During the time of the exodus, the children of Israel experienced in principle the same kind of deliverance. Pharaoh and his host pursued the children of Israel to the shores of the Red Sea. When it seemed there was no escape, the Lord parted the waters of the Red Sea, and the Israelites marched through the midst of the sea. In the future, the people of Israel will be besieged by the Antichrist and his army, but the Lord will come and deliver them by splitting the Mount of Olives and making a highway in the midst. How marvelous! Zechariah 14:12-13 says, "This will be the plague with which Jehovah will strike all the peoples who have fought against Jerusalem: Their flesh will rot while they are standing on their feet, and their eyes will rot in their sockets, and their tongue will rot in their mouth. And in that day a great panic from Jehovah will be among them; and each will seize his neighbor's hand, and his hand will rise up against his neighbor's hand."

According to 2 Thessalonians 2:8, the Lord Jesus will slay Antichrist and his armies by the breath of His mouth. The breath of the Lord's mouth will consume the rebellious people. Their eyes will be dried up, and their tongue will be destroyed. By defeating and destroying Antichrist and his armies, the house of Israel will be rescued.

Now we need to read Daniel 2:34-35: "You were watching until a stone was cut out without hands, and it struck the image at its feet of iron and clay and crushed them. Then the iron, the clay, the bronze, the silver, and the gold were crushed all at once, and they became like chaff from the summer threshing floors; and the wind carried them away so that no trace of them was found. And the stone that struck the image became a great mountain and filled the whole earth." No doubt, the stone that was cut out without hands is the Lord Jesus. He is the stone cut out by God who will smite the image. The king of Babylon, Nebuchadnezzar, had seen an image with a golden head, silver shoulders, a bronze abdomen, two iron legs, and ten toes partly of iron and partly of clay. The vision of that great image covers the entire Gentile period beginning with Babylon and ending when the Lord Jesus returns.

God's Desire for a Kingdom

In Exodus 19:5-6 God revealed His desire for the Jewish nation to be His kingdom on the earth. But due to their idolatry and degradation, God sent King Nebuchadnezzar of Babylon to destroy Jerusalem and the temple. The temple, the city, and the whole nation were lost. This means that the kingdom of God on the earth was also lost. In Ezra and Nehemiah, God is called the God of the heavens because His kingdom on the earth had been terminated. On the contrary, when Abraham prayed, he prayed to the Lord of the heavens and the earth. Because Abraham was there standing for God's dominion, God was also the God of the earth. But at the time of Nebuchadnezzar, there was not a kingdom standing on the earth for God's dominion. Therefore, God was called the God of the heavens.

The Age of the Gentiles

The age of the Gentiles began with Nebuchadnezzar, who was typified by the golden head in the great image. After him came Persia and Media, signified by the silver shoulders. Persia is today's Iran. Those two nations worked together as two shoulders. Because their authority was not as high as that of Nebuchadnezzar, they were signified by silver. Following these two empires was the empire of Greece, signified by the bronze abdomen. Alexander crossed the Mediterranean Sea and defeated Persia and Media. After Greece came the Roman Empire, signified by the two legs. According to history, the Roman Empire was divided into the western part and the eastern part. Thus, the two parts are the two legs. While the dignity of the Roman Empire did not compare with the others who were signified by the gold, silver, and bronze, it was very strong as signified by the iron. Iron in the Bible signifies strength and power (Rev. 2:27; 12:5; 19:15; Psa. 2:9).

Both Daniel and Revelation tell us that after the Roman Empire there will be ten nations, signified in Revelation by the ten horns (chs. 13; 17). In those two chapters the ten horns signify the ten nations under the rule of the Antichrist. These ten nations are also the ten toes. Daniel 2 says that the stone will fall upon the image, that is, upon the Gentile powers. The Lord Jesus will strike the image. By falling upon the ten toes, the Lord Jesus will strike the entirety of the Gentile power. Christ is the stone who will strike the Gentile nations. What Daniel spoke corresponds to the Lord Jesus' words concerning

the stone which the builders rejected in Matthew 21:44: “On whomever it falls, it shall crush him to powder and scatter him like chaff.”

The Stone Becoming a Mountain

After the Lord strikes the entire image, representing the whole Gentile world, the stone will become a great mountain that will fill the whole earth. This means that Christ as a stone will become the kingdom. A mountain in the Bible signifies a kingdom. The Lord Jesus will become the kingdom filling the whole earth. This word is fulfilled in Revelation 11:15: “The kingdom of the world has become the kingdom of our Lord and of His Christ, and He will reign forever and ever.” After the Lord Jesus terminates the Gentile dispensation, the whole earth will be filled with His kingdom. His kingdom is just the enlargement of Himself. The stone becomes the mountain. This means that Christ becomes the kingdom. The kingdom of the heavens is simply the enlargement of Christ. The Lord Jesus Himself is the King; when He gets into all of us, He becomes the kingdom. Thus, the stone becomes the mountain; Christ becomes the kingdom. While there are many other verses in the Old Testament concerning this matter, these are the representative verses.

The Harvest of Grapes

In the Old Testament the kingdom was a matter of prophecy. But in the New Testament it is a matter of fulfillment. Revelation 14 reveals both the firstfruits and the harvest. In addition to this harvest of wheat, there is also a harvest of grapes. In God’s eyes there are two fields, or farms, on the earth. One is the wheat farm representing His people. The other is the vine farm growing grapes representing the worldly people. The Christians are likened to wheat, and the unbelievers are likened to grapes. According to Revelation 14:17-20, the clusters of the vine of the earth were gathered and cast into the great winepress of the fury of God. The winepress was trodden outside the city, and blood came out of the winepress up to the bridles of the horses. It does not say that the juice of the grape came out but that blood came out. Furthermore, it says that blood came out up to the horses’ bridles. This indicates that many horses will be there. The blood became a deep current for about two hundred miles. Millions of people of the armies of the earth will be put into this winepress and trodden like grapes.

Who will tread this great winepress? By reading Isaiah 63:1-6, we can see that it is the Lord Himself who will tread the winepress. That will be the day of the vengeance of the Lord; He will tread down the people in His anger, make them drunk in His fury, and bring down their strength to the earth. This will be the reaping of the grapes, the unbelievers.

Armageddon

Now we need to read Revelation 16:12-16: “The sixth poured out his bowl upon the great river Euphrates; and its water was dried up that the way of the kings from the rising of the sun might be prepared. And I saw, out of the mouth of the dragon and out of the mouth of the beast and out of the mouth of the false prophet, three unclean spirits as frogs; for they are spirits of demons doing signs, which go forth to the kings of the whole inhabited earth to gather them to the war of the great day of God the Almighty. (Behold, I come as a thief. Blessed is he who watches and keeps his garments that he may not walk naked and they see his shame.) And they gathered them to the place which in Hebrew is called, Armageddon.” The beast mentioned here is the Antichrist. While the Gentiles are preparing and collecting an army, the Lord Jesus will sound out a warning to the believers. This portion indicates that there will be believers still left on the earth at that time.

Armageddon, meaning the “the mountain of slaughter,” is very close to Bozrah and Jahazah. The mountain and the valley are quite close to one another. This indicates that at the very time the Lord Jesus will be coming back, the three evil spirits will go out to stir up the people from the Far East. Verse 12 says, “That the way of the kings from the rising of the sun might be prepared.” The kings from the rising of the sun will not be Europeans or people from the Middle East, but they will be from the east of the Euphrates.

Now we need to read Revelation 9:13-18: “The sixth angel trumpeted, and I heard a voice out of the four horns of the golden altar which is before God saying to the sixth angel who had the trumpet, Release the four angels who are bound at the great river Euphrates. And the four angels were released, who had been prepared for the hour and day and month and year that they might kill the third part of men. And the number of the armies of horsemen was two hundred million; I heard their number. And thus I saw the horses in the vision and those sitting on them, having breastplates of fire and of hyacinth and of brimstone; and the heads of the horses were like the heads of

lions, and out of their mouths proceed fire and smoke and brimstone. By these three plagues the third part of the men were killed, by the fire and the smoke and the brimstone proceeding out of their mouths." The river Euphrates is mentioned also in this portion. It says that the third part of the men will be killed and that the number of cavalry troops will be two hundred million.

Two Hundred Million Cavalrymen

This corresponds to the account in chapter 16. The evil spirits will be released to stir up the people from the Far East, who will come with their horsemen in the number of two hundred million. They will come from the Far East, passing through the Euphrates River to Armageddon. Armageddon is very close to Jerusalem, where the Antichrist and his armies will be. These armies will be killed at Armageddon by fire and smoke and brimstone. In principle, these are the same as a modern nuclear bombing. Remember that these are not the armies under the Antichrist but the armies from the East who have passed through the river Euphrates. These armies from the East will first come to the area of the Euphrates River, today's Iraq and Iran; then they will come to Jerusalem.

The Winepress

While the Antichrist will be attacking Jerusalem, the two hundred million horsemen from the East will also come to Jerusalem. This means that the armies of the earth will be gathered together at one time just like grapes from the vineyard are gathered into the winepress. Then the Lord Jesus will come to tread the winepress. By His treading the winepress, the Lord Jesus will destroy the armies of the Antichrist and the two hundred million cavalrymen from the Far East.

According to Revelation 17:12-14, the ten horns, representing the ten kings, will suddenly receive authority as kings for one hour with the beast, the Antichrist. These will make war with the Lamb, but the Lamb shall overcome them. Those with Him, His armies, will be those who are chosen and faithful. Who are the chosen and faithful ones? Remember the Lord's words: "Many are called but few are chosen" (Matt. 22:14). The chosen ones are those faithful to the Lord who will become His army.

According to Revelation 19, His armies will be dressed in fine linen, bright and clean. The fine linen garment is the garment for the marriage feast and is also the fighting garment. The marriage garment will be the fighting garment. The Lord will tread the winepress and prepare a feast for all the birds in the heavens. When the wicked one appears, the Lord will destroy him with a sharp sword out of His mouth. Thus, all the verses in the Old Testament and the New Testament are very consistent. The Lord Jesus will come to destroy all the rebellious armies by the breath of His mouth. This is why the blood will be so deep (14:20).

Then according to Revelation 11:15, the kingdom of the world will become the kingdom of our Lord and of His Christ. The Gentile armies will be destroyed, and the whole image representing the Gentile age will be smashed.

THE JEWS

Now let us consider how the Lord will deal with the Jews at His coming back. During the age of the church, the Lord has temporarily given up the people of Israel and treats them like the Gentiles. They must receive the gospel to be saved and become members of the church. But at the end of this age, according to Zechariah 13 and Romans 11, the Jewish nation will be revived and will turn to the Lord. Because it will occur during the tribulation, many will suffer and die. Zechariah 13:8-9 says that at least two-thirds of the living Jews will be cut off. This does not include the millions killed by Hitler. When the Lord Jesus comes back, the remaining one-third will repent and believe in the Lord. The house of Israel will be saved at that time.

After they are regenerated and saved, they will be translated into the millennial kingdom on the earth to be the priests teaching the nations how to serve God (Zech. 8; Isa. 2). The overcomers among the Christians will be the kings, the ruling ones, during the millennial kingdom, and the saved ones of Israel will be the priests. Although the Jews will be regenerated and saved, they will not be transformed, and their bodies will not at that time be transfigured. Later, just before the time of the New Jerusalem, they will be transformed and changed in body. Romans 11:25-26 says that all Israel will be saved. This is confirmed by Jeremiah 3:17: “At that time they will call Jerusalem the throne of Jehovah, and all the nations will be gathered to it because the name of Jehovah is at Jerusalem; and they will no longer walk after the stubbornness of their evil heart.” After the destruction of the Gentile

armies and the salvation of the Jewish people, the Gentiles who are left will call Jerusalem the throne of the Jehovah. All the nations will be gathered to the name of Jehovah in Jerusalem. They will walk no more after the stubbornness of their evil heart. Today all the Gentiles are walking after the stubbornness of their evil heart, but in that day they will go to Jerusalem to the name of Jehovah.

Isaiah 11:10 also speaks concerning that time. “In that day the root of Jesse, / Who stands as a banner to the peoples— / Him will the nations seek, / And His resting place will be the glory.” Of course, Christ is the root of Jesse. Christ as the root of Jesse will stand as a banner to all the Gentile nations. The Gentile nations will all seek after Christ, and His resting place will be the glory.

Teaching the Gentiles to Worship God

Let us also read Isaiah 2:2-4a: “In the last days / The mountain of the house of Jehovah will be established / On the top of the mountains; / And it will be lifted up above the hills; / And all the nations will stream to it, / And many peoples will come and say, / Come and let us go up to the mountain of Jehovah, / To the house of the God of Jacob, / That He may instruct us in His ways, / And that we may walk in His paths. / For from Zion will go forth instruction, / And the word of Jehovah from Jerusalem; / And He will judge between the nations, / And will decide matters for many peoples.” That will be the time of real peace upon the earth. No matter how much people talk about peace today, there is no peace. Peace on the earth will not come until the Lord Jesus is the King. These few verses tell us that after the Lord Jesus destroys the Gentile armies, He will save the Jewish people and take Jerusalem as His capital on the earth. He will set up His throne there, and the Gentiles who are remaining on the earth will come to seek after Him. Jerusalem will become a center to teach the Gentiles how to serve the Lord.

Concerning that time, Zechariah 8:20-23 says, “Thus says Jehovah of hosts, Peoples will again come, even the inhabitants of many cities; and the inhabitants of one will go to another, saying, Let us go at once to entreat the favor of Jehovah and to seek Jehovah of hosts; and the other: I will go too. Indeed, many peoples and strong nations will come to seek Jehovah of hosts in Jerusalem and to entreat the favor of Jehovah. Thus says Jehovah of hosts, In those days, from all the languages of the nations, ten men will take hold,

indeed, they will take hold of the skirt of a Jewish man, saying, Let us go with you, for we have heard that God is with you."

Among the ancient Jews, the priests were the minority among the people of God. The people received teaching and instruction concerning God from the priests. They taught the people how to worship and serve God. That was a picture of the future situation during the time of the millennium. During the millennium, the Gentiles will take the converted Jews as priests. Ten Gentiles will come to one Jew, asking him to teach them how to serve the Lord. Because they will hear that the Lord is with the Jews, they will come to learn how to serve the Lord. This means that, during the millennium, the Gentiles will be the nations, and the converted Jews will be the priests, teaching them to worship God.

The Lord's Doing

The present situation in the Middle East is very significant! In 1948 the nation of Israel was re-formed, and in 1967 the city of Jerusalem was returned to the Jews. When I was saved more than fifty years ago, I read the prophecies concerning the re-forming of the nation of Israel. At that time I could hardly believe that the nation of Israel could be re-formed. It seemed impossible for Jerusalem to be returned to the Jews. But Hallelujah! What seems impossible to us is possible with God! And the Lord did it! It was the Lord's doing, and it was marvelous in our eyes.

In 1948 the nation of Israel was suddenly re-formed. Then in 1967 in only six days the city of Jerusalem was returned to the Jews. For twenty-five centuries, since 606 B.C., Jerusalem had not been under the control of the Jewish people. But suddenly overnight it was put back into their hands. Surely this is the Lord's doing. Today the focus of the world's attention is upon the Middle East situation with the little nation of Israel as the center. All the Ishmaelites, the Arabs, are still plotting against the Jews. But Israel is being preserved by the Lord.

In addition to the Middle East situation there is the European situation. Soon Europe will have ten nations. Besides the Middle East and the European situation, there is the Far East. The dividing line is the river Euphrates. Surely the Antichrist will be the leader of the European powers. The Europeans will form armies under his hand. They will go forth to Palestine to fight against

the nation of Israel in order to capture Jerusalem. At the same time two hundred million horsemen will come from the Far East, passing through the river Euphrates. All those powers will come together. While they are gathered together, the Lord will come to tread the winepress. The armies will be formed in the territory of Europe, and the horsemen will be assembled in the Far East during the time of the tribulation.

We have seen that some of the more matured saints will be taken as firstfruits to the third heaven before the tribulation. The harvest will be taken in the midst of the tribulation. The firstfruits will be taken away to the third heaven, God's house. They will come with the Lord Jesus to the air, and the rest of the harvest will be caught up to the air to meet with them. There the Lord Jesus will exercise His judgment over all the believers to select the overcomers for His army. While the Lord Jesus is forming His army in the air, all the nations will be forming their armies on the earth and will be gathered to Jerusalem (Rev. 16:14, 16; 19:19). This means that the grapes from every corner of the grape field will be collected to the center of the winepress (14:18-19). The Lord will come from the air with His army of called, chosen, and faithful ones, and He will destroy Antichrist with his army and the two hundred million horsemen from the Far East (19:11-21). At the same time, the Spirit will be poured out upon the besieged Israel (Zech. 12:10). They will repent, and the whole house of David will be saved.

The whole earth will become the kingdom of Christ (Rev. 11:15). The stone that strikes the Gentile world will become the mountain, the kingdom, filling the whole earth (Dan. 2:35). Some of the Gentiles will be left alive after the battle of Armageddon, and they will become the peoples, the nations, upon the earth. The converted and saved Jews will be the priests in Jerusalem teaching people how to serve the Lord. The Lord Jesus will set up Jerusalem as His capital, and from His throne He will reign as King over the whole earth.

CHAPTER FORTY-TWO

THE LORD'S JUDGMENT OF THE GENTILES AFTER THE WAR OF ARMAGEDDON

Scripture Reading: Matt. 25:31-46; 13:47-50; Rev. 14:6-7; Acts 10:42; 2 Tim. 4:1; Matt. 19:28; Acts 3:21; Isa. 11:6-9

When the Lord Jesus comes back, He will fully clear up the situation with the Christians. First, the false ones will be bound and thrown into the fire. These are the tares. Then the matured ones will be caught up into the air, along with the resurrected believers, where the Lord will exercise His judgment over them. At that time some of them will be chosen to be the overcoming ones who will be the Lord's army to fight against the Antichrist. They will also feast with the Lord at the marriage feast of the Lamb. Some of the Christians will be the defeated ones and, because they are defeated, they will suffer some punishment. They will miss the marriage feast, the manifestation of the kingdom. They will lose their reward, and they will also suffer some kind of dealing. Thus, by the rapture the Lord Jesus will clear up the whole situation among the Christians.

THREE KINDS OF PEOPLES

As we mentioned previously, when the Lord Jesus returns, there will be basically three kinds of people upon the earth: the Christians, the Jews, and the Gentiles (1 Cor. 10:32). At His coming back He will defeat and destroy the Gentile army and rescue the Jewish people. They will become priests to God during the millennium. Some Gentiles, however, will still be left on the earth, not having been destroyed with the armies. Although so many horsemen and soldiers will have been destroyed by the Lord, some people of the nations will be left alive. It is not logical to assume that all the people will be soldiers and that all will be destroyed. Rather, all the armies will be destroyed, but some of the people will be left. What will happen to those who are left from the nations? The Lord must clear up the situation with them. To do this He will send His angels to collect all the people of the nations who remain at that time so that He can exercise His judgment on them.

What will be the Lord's basis for judging them? It is difficult for us to say. Surely it is not a judgment according to the law or to the gospel. If it is a judgment according to the gospel, it will be because they did not repent and believe in the Lord Jesus. Or if it is a judgment according to the law, it will be because they did not keep the law. But the judgment of the remaining nations will not be based upon these two items. The judgment of the nations at that time will be based upon how they treated the Lord's little brothers during the time of the tribulation (Matt. 25:31-46). By this we can see that the Lord has His dispensation, His way of dealing with people. In the dispensation of the law, the Lord dealt with people according to the law. In the dispensation of grace, the Lord deals with people according to grace. But during the time of the tribulation, the Lord will not deal with the nations according to law or grace. Rather, He will deal with them according to how they treated His little brothers, the Jews and remaining Christians, during the time of the tribulation. If the nations treated the least of His brethren well, they will be considered as sheep; but if they treated the little ones poorly, they will be considered as goats and will be destroyed.

Matthew 25:31-46 covers the parable of the sheep and the goats. Many Christian teachers have made a wrong application of this parable, saying that it refers to Christians. They think that the Lord Jesus will exercise His judgment over the believers, dividing them into two groups. One group will be the real Christians, represented by the sheep; the other group will be the false Christians, represented by the goats. According to their concept, the good ones will be saved to enter into the kingdom, and the bad ones will be cast into the lake of fire. However, this interpretation is not accurate. Verse 32 says that all the *nations* will be gathered before Him. The Greek word here for *nations* is the same word used for *Gentiles*. It will not be the believers who are gathered before Him but the unbelievers, the Gentiles. With the Gentiles gathered before Him, the Lord will separate them one from the other as the shepherd divides the sheep from the goats.

THE ETERNAL GOSPEL

This judgment of the nations by the Lord will not be without a warning. Revelation 14:6-7 says, "I saw another angel flying in mid-heaven, having an eternal gospel to announce to those dwelling on the earth, even to every nation and tribe and tongue and people, saying with a loud voice, Fear God and give Him glory because the hour of His judgment has come; and worship

Him who has made heaven and earth and the sea and the springs of waters." The gospel preached in these verses is not the gospel of grace but the eternal gospel. Nor is it preached by a man but by an angel. The gospel of grace on the other hand is not preached by the angels but by man. An angel did come to Cornelius in Acts 10, but he did not preach the gospel to Cornelius. Rather, the angel told him to call Peter. As a man, Peter was privileged and authorized to preach the gospel of grace. In Revelation 14 an angel, not a man, is preaching the eternal gospel. Furthermore, this gospel is not preached on the earth but from the air.

What is the content of the eternal gospel? We know that the content of the gospel of grace is to repent and to believe. These are the two main items of the content of the gospel of grace. But in Revelation 14 the content of the eternal gospel is different. It simply says to fear God and worship Him. The nations need to fear God because the time of judgment is coming. The nations will not be told to worship God as their Redeemer but as their Creator, the One who created them. They will be told to fear God because the time of judgment is coming and to worship God because He is their Creator. In order to understand these verses we must consider their context. This same chapter says, "Another angel, a third one, followed them, saying with a loud voice, If anyone worships the beast and his image and receives a mark on his forehead or on his hand, he also shall drink of the wine of the fury of God, which is mixed undiluted in the cup of His wrath; and he shall be tormented in fire and brimstone before the holy angels and before the Lamb. And the smoke of their tormenting goes up forever and ever; and they have no rest day and night, those who worship the beast and his image, and whoever receives the mark of his name. Here is the endurance of the saints, those who keep the commandments of God and the faith of Jesus" (vv. 9-12). This means that the eternal gospel will be preached by the angel at the very time when the Antichrist is forcing people to worship him. While Antichrist is forcing people to worship him, an angel from the air will warn people not to worship him but to worship God. It is as if the angel will testify to all the nations that the beast, Antichrist, is not their creator. They should not worship him but should worship God, their Creator. If they worship the beast, the Antichrist, God will judge them. Verse 12 shows who the people of God will be when the Antichrist rises up. Here is the endurance of the saints. The saints here will include two peoples: the Jews who keep the commandments of God and the Christians who have the faith of Jesus. The Antichrist will set up an image in the temple

and force people to worship him. But the Jews and the Christians will refuse to worship his image. Even at that time there will be some Christians left who were not matured and able to be raptured. They will refuse to worship the image of the beast, so the Antichrist will persecute them. Because he will kill them, they will have the need of much endurance. Verse 13 goes on to say, “Blessed are the dead who die in the Lord from now on.” Surely these are the ones who will die through the persecution of the Antichrist.

In other words, during the time of the tribulation, the Antichrist will set up his image, forcing people to worship it as an idol. However, the Jewish people and the remaining Christians who were not raptured as the firstfruits will not worship his image, so they will be persecuted even to death. Under these circumstances God will send the angel to preach the eternal gospel to the nations of the earth. He will warn them to fear God and worship God. This means to not persecute the ones who are keeping the commandments of God and the ones who have the faith of Jesus. Do not persecute those people who will not worship the image of the Antichrist. Rather, fear God.

All the people on the earth will hear this gospel from the air. It will cover the whole earth. Of all the people who hear this word, a few will receive it and not persecute the Jews and Christians. The Jews and Christians at that time will be under much persecution and suffering. They will be short of food, short of drink, and short of clothing. They will be chased from place to place, making them the strangers. And they will be put into prison. All these points are mentioned by the Lord Jesus in Matthew 25. Those peoples of the nations who care for the little brothers of Christ during that time will be considered as the sheep. Those who persecute the Jews and Christians at that time will be considered as the goats.

The good ones, who treated the little brothers of the Lord well during the tribulation, will be transferred into the millennial kingdom to be the nations. The overcoming Christians will be the kings, and the converted Jews will be the priests, but the people will be the good ones from among the nations whom the Lord considers as sheep. Through these dealings, the Lord Jesus will produce three kinds of people: the overcoming Christians as the kings, the converted Jews as the priests, and the preserved, but not regenerated, Gentiles as the people. All the bad ones, the goats, will be cast into the fire.

This parable of the sheep and the goats in Matthew 25 corresponds to the parable of the net in Matthew 13:47-50. The first six parables in Matthew 13 are related mostly to the Christians, with a small part related to the Jews. The treasure hidden in the field mainly refers to the kingdom with Israel. The pearl that comes out of the water signifies the church. Both are eventually for the kingdom. Thus, in Matthew 13 there are also the three kinds of people: the Jews with the kingdom as the treasure hidden in the field, the Gentiles regenerated and transformed into a pearl, the church, and finally, there are the ones left in the sea, the Gentiles. The Lord sent the angel to collect those who were left in the sea. The net cast into the sea brings in every kind of creature without regeneration or transformation. This refers to the Gentiles, the natural people from the corrupted world. The Lord will gather all these before Him and judge them. The good will be collected into vessels, that is, into the millennial kingdom to be the nations, but the evil shall be cast into the furnace of fire.

THE JUDGE OF THE LIVING AND THE DEAD

Both Acts 10:42 and 2 Timothy 4:1 tell us that the Lord Jesus was appointed by God to judge the living and the dead. Before the millennium the Lord Jesus will judge the living unbelievers on the throne of His glory (Matt. 25:31). After the thousand years all the dead people of the nations will be resurrected, and the Lord Jesus will judge them at the great white throne (Rev. 20:11-12). So the Lord will be the Judge of the living unbelievers before the millennium, and He will be the Judge of the dead unbelievers after the millennium. By these two judgments the Lord Jesus will fully clear up the situation among all the Gentiles.

From among the Christians the Lord Jesus desires to get a group of kings to rule over the earth with Him. From among the Jews the Lord Jesus desires to get a group of priests to teach people how to serve Him during the millennium. Then from the Gentile world He desires to get a group of people who will be the nations during the millennium and also during the new heaven and the new earth. Thus, there are the kings, the priests, and the people. Everything works together for the kingdom! We must realize that the Gentiles at that time will only be preserved, not regenerated. They will be preserved from being condemned and lost, but they will not be regenerated.

CREATION RESTORED

Acts 3:21 says that heaven must receive the Lord Jesus until the times of the restoration of all things. From the time of the fall of man, the whole of creation became degraded. Since that time everything has been under decay and corruption. According to Romans 8, all creation is groaning under the slavery of corruption. Every new item soon becomes old because it is under the law of decay and corruption. A little baby looks so fresh, but an old man does not look fresh because he is under the process of decaying. The more we grow, the more we are decaying. Our physical body is under the principle of the slavery of corruption. When the Lord Jesus comes back, there will be a restoration. Restoration will be versus the corruption. Everything will be restored.

Speaking of the time of restoration, Isaiah 65:20 says, "There will no longer be in her / An infant who reaches the age of only a few days / Nor an old man who does not fill up his days; / For the lad will die at a hundred years of age, / And the sinner, being a hundred years of age, will be cursed." During that time, one who is a hundred years old will be considered as a child. Everyone will live hundreds of years.

Isaiah 11:6 further says, "The wolf will dwell with the lamb; / And the leopard will lie down with the kid, / And the calf and the young lion and the fatling together; / And a young boy will lead them about." At the time of the restoration, all the beasts will be meek and gentle. The lions and leopards and wild beasts will not hurt people. The children can play with the lions, the vipers, and the poisonous serpents. Neither shall there be any more war. The spears shall be made into plows. There will be no more fighting; instead there will be farming. That will be the time of real peace upon the earth, because everything will be restored.

THE RESTORATION

The nations who will be considered as sheep at that time will be preserved not by regeneration but by restoration. Today all the unbelievers on earth are degraded persons, but during the millennium, all the nations will be restored persons. But that does not mean they will be regenerated. As believers we are regenerated. We have received another life into us. Those nations in the restoration will still have the same nature and the same element within them. What we have is not restoration but regeneration. During the millennium, the nations will not be regenerated but restored. Although Matthew 19:28 in the

King James Version uses the word *regeneration,* this is not the Greek word that is normally used for *regeneration*. The Greek word in verse 28 means a kind of restoration. Regeneration means that we receive another life besides our natural life. We all received the natural life by our natural birth from our parents. When we believed in the Lord Jesus, we received another life, which is God's life, and were regenerated.

All the good ones in Matthew 25, who will be considered as the sheep, will not be born again. They will not receive another life, but God will restore their created life to its condition before the fall. God will restore all the degraded creation. Thus, the word *regeneration* in Matthew 19:28 (KJV) does not mean regeneration in the sense of being reborn. When applied to believers, the word *regeneration* means to be reborn, but when applied in this verse to the age, it means restitution or restoration.

THE MILLENNIAL KINGDOM

After the Lord fully deals with the Christians, the Jews, and the nations, He will bring in the millennial kingdom. The kingdom of the Lord on the earth will be for one thousand years. *Millennium* means "one thousand years." According to the chart of the kingdom in chapter 35, the fifth section of the chart is the millennium. It is divided into two parts. The upper part is the heavenly part, and the lower part is the earthly part. In the heavenly part there is the manifestation of the kingdom with Christ and the overcoming saints. Included in the heavenly part will also be the kingdom of the Father where the righteous will shine forth like the sun in the kingdom of their Father (Matt. 13:43). This is the heavenly part of the Father's kingdom, the upper part of the kingdom. The lower part is called the kingdom of the Son of Man. In the lower part the converted Israelites will be the priests leading the people to worship God. Around the Jews within the lower part will be the preserved, restored nations. In Matthew 13:41 the Lord Jesus said that He will send His angels to collect out of His kingdom all the stumbling blocks and those who practice lawlessness. Thus, all the wicked ones will be gone, the converted Jews will be the priests, and the nations who will be restored and preserved will be the people. So there will be three classes of people during the millennium: the kings, the priests, and the people. The creation will be restored. There will be no more war; the whole earth will be full of peace. What a marvelous and glorious kingdom that will be!

At the end of the millennium, however, some of the nations will be induced by Satan to rebel once more against God (Rev. 20:7-9). The rebellious ones then will be destroyed by being cast into the lake of fire, and those who did not rebel will be transferred into the new heavens and new earth to be the nations. Revelation 21:24 says that the nations will walk by the light of the New Jerusalem. The New Jerusalem will be the composition of all the regenerated, saved, and transformed persons. But the nations will be there simply as natural, restored people.

The fruit of the tree of life will be food for the inhabitants of the New Jerusalem, and the leaves of the tree of life will be for the healing of the nations so that they can exist. From the New Jerusalem a group of kings and priests will rule over the restored nations.

While the restored age will be quite marvelous, it will still be in the old creation. Therefore, there is the sixth section on the chart, the new heaven and the new earth. During the time of the new heaven and the new earth, everything will be made new, and the New Jerusalem will be the center. This will be God's eternal kingdom.

To the sheep, the nations, the millennial kingdom will be the kingdom prepared *from* the foundation of the world (Matt. 25:34). Those who are born again, however, are those who are chosen in Him *before* the foundation of the world (Eph. 1:3-4). The nations will receive something prepared from the foundation of the world, whereas we believers will receive something prepared before the foundation of the world. This is another strong indication that these sheep are not believers. They are another category of people. During the millennium, we will be not the nations but the royal family; we will be the kings. Who will be the people? They will be the restored nations. According to Isaiah 65:20, those restored persons may still die, being several hundred years old. This means that they are not the regenerated persons. We, the regenerated persons, will never see death. But they, still being under the curse, will die. By this we can see that to be saved today is to be under one dispensation of God, and to be saved during the Lord's coming back is to be under another dispensation of God. God has different dispensations by which He produces different peoples. By the dispensation of the law, God will produce the Jewish people as the priests. By the dispensation of the gospel of grace, God will produce the overcomers to be the kings. By the dispensation of

the eternal gospel, God will produce the people to be the nations during the millennium and during the new heavens and the new earth.

CHAPTER FORTY-THREE

THE GROWTH AND HARVEST OF THE REALITY OF THE KINGDOM

We have pointed out previously that many matters concerning the kingdom are in Matthew in seed form. We have also pointed out that the kingdom has three aspects: the reality, the appearance, and the manifestation. The seed of the reality of the kingdom is in Matthew 5, 6, and 7. Now we need to see the growth and the harvest of the reality of the kingdom. In a previous chapter we covered seven aspects of the reality of the kingdom, including: the character of the children of the kingdom under the ruling of the heavens, the influence of the children of the kingdom upon the world, the righteousness of the children of the kingdom under the restriction of the law of life, the purity of the children of the kingdom in their good deeds, the attitude of the children of the kingdom toward mammon or riches, the principle of the children of the kingdom in dealing with others, and the grounds of the children of the kingdom for their walk and work. These seven aspects are in seed form in Matthew; they are developed in succeeding books, especially the Epistles; and they are harvested in the book of Revelation.

POOR IN SPIRIT

The first aspect of the character of the children of the kingdom under the ruling of the heavens is that they are poor in spirit. This point is sown in Matthew and developed in the Epistles and in Revelation. We need to read Romans 8:16 and 1:9: “The Spirit Himself witnesses with our spirit that we are children of God...For God is my witness, whom I serve in my spirit in the gospel of His Son, how unceasingly I make mention of you always in my prayers.” Matthew says that we need to be poor in spirit, and Romans 8:16 says the Spirit is bearing witness with our spirit. If we are not poor in spirit, empty in spirit, there is no way for the Spirit to come into us and witness in our spirit. Once we are poor in spirit, the Spirit can come in and fill us with Himself. The Spirit is with our spirit. Moreover, in Romans 1:9 Paul says that he served God in his spirit. Originally, his spirit was idle and filled up with worthless things, but now all the worthless things are gone. God’s Spirit filled his spirit, and he served God in his spirit.

In Revelation 1:10 John said, “I was in spirit on the Lord’s Day and heard behind me a loud voice like a trumpet.” According to the proper translation of this verse, there is no definite article before the word *spirit*. Furthermore, the *s* in *spirit* should not be a capital *S* but a lowercase *s*, indicating it is the human spirit. John was in his human spirit on the Lord’s Day and heard behind him a loud voice. After he heard the voice, verse 12 continues by saying, “I turned to see the voice that spoke with me; and when I turned, I saw seven golden lampstands.” This verse shows that in order to see the churches, we must be in our human spirit. Romans 8 indicates that we must be poor in spirit so that the Spirit may come into us. Romans 1 indicates that after the Spirit has filled our spirit, we may serve God in our spirit. Then Revelation 1:10 and 12 indicate that in order to see the churches we must be in our spirit.

We also need to read Revelation 21:10-11: “He carried me away in spirit onto a great and high mountain and showed me the holy city, Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, having the glory of God. Her light was like a most precious stone, like a jasper stone, as clear as crystal.” Again the proper rendering of this verse is “in spirit,” with a small letter *s* and no definite article. This is the same as Revelation 1:10. The way for us to see the holy city, Jerusalem, is to be carried away in spirit onto a great and high mountain.

By putting all these verses together, we can see from Romans and Revelation a rich development and harvest of the seed of the human spirit. Matthew begins by speaking of our need to be poor in spirit; Romans continues by saying that the Spirit witnesses with our spirit and that we serve God in our spirit; eventually, we see the churches and the New Jerusalem in our spirit. The seed is in Matthew 5; the growth is in Romans and other Epistles; the harvest is in Revelation.

MOURNING

The seed of mourning is sown in Matthew 5:4: “Blessed are those who mourn, for they shall be comforted.” Now let us read some verses that show the development of the seed of mourning. First is Acts 20:31: “Therefore watch, remembering that for three years, night and day, I did not cease admonishing each one with tears.” For Paul to admonish the church with tears night and day indicates that he was mourning for the condition of the church and the believers. Romans 9:2 says, “I have great grief and unceasing

pain in my heart." This verse shows Paul's mourning for the people of Israel that they might be saved. He had great grief and unceasing pain in his heart because of them. Finally, 2 Corinthians 7:7 says, "Not only by his coming, but also by the comfort with which he was comforted because of you, declaring to us your longing, your lamentation, your zeal for me, so that I rejoiced the more." This verse indicates that not only Paul but also the Corinthians were lamenting concerning a certain situation. Thus, the aspect of mourning is developed in the Epistles.

MEEKNESS

The third seed of the reality of the kingdom sown in Matthew is meekness. Matthew 5:5 says, "Blessed are the meek, for they shall inherit the earth." Ephesians 4:2 develops the matter of meekness: "With all lowliness and meekness, with long-suffering, bearing one another in love." This verse mentions not only meekness but also lowliness with long-suffering and bearing one another in love. This is much more than simply meekness; it indicates some rich development. Titus 3:2 says, "To slander no one, to be uncontentious, gentle, showing all meekness toward all men." The gentleness and the showing all meekness toward all men is a development of the meekness in Matthew 5:5. James 3:13 says, "Who is wise and understanding among you? Let him show by his good manner of life his works in meekness of wisdom." These verses show a rich and full development of the seed of meekness which was sown in Matthew.

HUNGERING AND THIRSTING FOR RIGHTEOUSNESS

The seed of hungering and thirsting for righteousness is developed in 1 Timothy 6:11: "You, O man of God, flee these things, and pursue righteousness, godliness, faith, love, endurance, meekness." It is further developed in 2 Timothy 2:22: "Flee youthful lusts, and pursue righteousness, faith, love, peace with those who call on the Lord out of a pure heart."

MERCIFUL

The matter of showing mercy is developed in Romans 12:8b: "He who shows mercy, in cheerfulness." This verse indicates that even the showing of mercy is a gift. Many Christians have never considered this. From the context of Romans 12, showing mercy is listed as a gift along with teaching, leading,

exhorting, and prophesying. In this chapter even the extending of hospitality to guests is a gift. Both showing mercy and giving hospitality are gifts. Finally, Colossians 3:12 says, “Put on therefore, as God’s chosen ones, holy and beloved, inward parts of compassion, kindness, lowliness, meekness, long-suffering.”

PURE IN HEART

The seed of being pure in heart is developed in 2 Timothy 2:22c: “With those who call on the Lord out of a pure heart.” Here something is added to being pure in heart. That is, you must pursue righteousness, faith, love, and peace with those who call on the Lord out of a pure heart. There is not only the matter of a pure heart but also the matter of calling out of such a pure heart. Matthew 5 only says “pure in heart,” but here Paul adds pursuing and calling on the Lord with others. Second Corinthians 3:16 says, “Whenever their heart turns to the Lord, the veil is taken away.” Whenever our heart turns to the Lord, the veils are taken away. This is a further development of being pure in heart. It is having a heart that is turned to the Lord so that all the veils are gone.

MAKING PEACE

The matter of making peace is developed in Hebrews 12:14: “Pursue peace with all men and sanctification, without which no one will see the Lord.” Ephesians 4:3 says, “Being diligent to keep the oneness of the Spirit in the uniting bond of peace.” Finally, James 3:18 says, “The fruit of righteousness is sown in peace by those who make peace.” Peace and righteousness are always related. If we do not have righteousness, it is impossible for us to have peace. Righteousness must come first, and then peace will come. Why is there no peace on the earth? It is because there is no righteousness. Because the nations are not righteous, they have no peace. When we have the Lord Jesus, we have the real righteousness; then we have peace. This is why we must first pursue righteousness and then peace.

SUFFERING FOR RIGHTEOUSNESS

Acts 14:22 says, “Establishing the souls of the disciples, exhorting them to continue in the faith and saying that through many tribulations we must enter into the kingdom of God.” This verse says that we enter into the kingdom of

God through many tribulations, or much suffering. To suffer for righteousness is simply to suffer for the kingdom, because God's kingdom is one of righteousness. Moreover, 2 Timothy 3:12 says, "Indeed all who desire to live godly in Christ Jesus will be persecuted." To live godly in Christ Jesus is to have the real righteousness. The real righteousness will cause a kind of suffering.

SUFFERING FOR CHRIST

The seed of suffering for Christ is developed in Acts 5:41-42: "So they went from the presence of the Sanhedrin, rejoicing that they were counted worthy to be dishonored on behalf of the Name. And every day, in the temple and from house to house, they did not cease teaching and announcing the gospel of Jesus as the Christ." Here the disciples rejoiced because they were counted worthy to suffer for Christ. The Lord Jesus told His disciples that when they were persecuted for His sake they should rejoice. Surely Peter and John believed the Lord and remembered what He told them on the mount. Thus, they were rejoicing because of their suffering for Christ. Paul indicates that he suffered for Christ in Acts 20:19 and 24: "Serving the Lord as a slave with all humility and tears and trials which came upon me by the plots of the Jews...But I consider my life of no account as if precious to myself, in order that I may finish my course and the ministry which I have received from the Lord Jesus to solemnly testify of the gospel of the grace of God." These verses indicate that Paul was a brother willing to suffer everything for Christ, even the loss of his life.

From all these verses, we can see the development of the reality of the kingdom revealed in Matthew 5. As a conclusion to this point we need to read 2 Corinthians 6:4-10: "In everything we commend ourselves as ministers of God, in much endurance, in afflictions, in necessities, in distresses, in stripes, in imprisonments, in tumults, in labors, in watchings, in fastings; in pureness, in knowledge, in long-suffering, in kindness, in a holy spirit, in unfeigned love, in the word of truth, in the power of God; through the weapons of righteousness on the right and on the left, through glory and dishonor, through evil report and good report; as deceivers and yet true; as unknown and yet well known; as dying and yet behold we live; as being disciplined and yet not being put to death; as made sorrowful yet always rejoicing; as poor yet enriching many; as having nothing and yet possessing all things." In verse

6 *holy spirit* should be lowercased, indicating that our spirit has become a holy spirit. There is no article in the original language.

THE INFLUENCE OF THE CHILDREN OF THE KINGDOM UPON THE WORLD

As Salt

As we have seen, salt is used to kill corruption and leaven. Where there is salt, there is no leaven. The seed of the salt of the earth is sown in Matthew 5:13 and is developed in 1 Corinthians 5:7-8: "Purge out the old leaven that you may be a new lump, even as you are unleavened; for our Passover, Christ, also has been sacrificed. So then let us keep the feast, not with old leaven, neither with the leaven of malice and evil, but with the unleavened bread of sincerity and truth." These verses say that we should purge out the leaven and keep the feast with unleavened bread. This simply means that we should be the salt and not allow any leaven to exist.

Then we need to read Ephesians 4:22-24: "That you put off, as regards your former manner of life, the old man, which is being corrupted according to the lusts of the deceit, and that you be renewed in the spirit of your mind and put on the new man, which was created according to God in righteousness and holiness of the reality." Here the old man is a kind of corruption, and the new man is a kind of salt. Because the new man bears the righteousness and holiness of God, he is the salt. We were the old man, but we have been renewed and transformed into the new man. Now we are no longer leaven corrupting others, but instead we are salt killing the corruption.

As Light

Matthew 5:14 says that we are the light of the world. This seed is developed in Philippians 2:15-16a: "That you may be blameless and guileless, children of God without blemish in the midst of a crooked and perverted generation, among whom you shine as luminaries in the world, holding forth the word of life, so that I may have a boast in the day of Christ." The seed of the Lord's disciples being the light of the world reaches its fullest development in Revelation 1:20: "The mystery of the seven stars which you saw upon My right hand and the seven golden lampstands: The seven stars are the messengers of the seven churches, and the seven lampstands are the seven churches." This

verse shows us not merely a small lamp but a lampstand. In Matthew 5 there is only a small lamp, but in Revelation 1 there are seven lampstands. This is the full development of our being light to the world. Revelation 2:5 says, "Remember therefore where you have fallen from and repent and do the first works; but if not, I am coming to you and will remove your lampstand out of its place, unless you repent." This verse also shows that Christians as the church must eventually be a lampstand. In Matthew 5 there is merely a lamp; in Revelation there is the full development of the lampstands shining in the darkness.

THE RIGHTEOUSNESS OF THE CHILDREN OF THE KINGDOM UNDER THE RESTRICTION OF THE LAW OF LIFE

The children of the kingdom must have a righteousness that surpasses others' righteousness. First Corinthians 6:9 says, "Do you not know that the unrighteous will not inherit the kingdom of God?" If we desire to inherit the kingdom of God, we must have righteousness. An unrighteous person can never inherit the kingdom of God. Then Romans 14:17 says, "The kingdom of God is not eating and drinking, but righteousness and peace and joy in the Holy Spirit." Righteousness comes first, then peace, then joy in the Holy Spirit. Ephesians 4:24 says that we "put on the new man, which was created according to God in righteousness." The new man was created according to God in righteousness. Righteousness is always the first aspect.

Revelation 19:7-8 says, "Let us rejoice and exult, and let us give the glory to Him, for the marriage of the Lamb has come, and His wife has made herself ready. And it was given to her that she should be clothed in fine linen, bright and clean; for the fine linen is the righteousnesses of the saints." The fine linen is the righteousnesses, the righteous deeds, of the saints. We have already pointed out that this righteousness will be the garment qualifying the bride to attend the marriage feast of the Bridegroom. Thus, righteousness is extremely important. Second Peter 3:13 says, "According to His promise we are expecting new heavens and a new earth, in which righteousness dwells." *New heavens and a new earth* indicates eternity. It is not simply a matter of having a righteousness that surpasses others' righteousness, but of having the righteousness that qualifies us to attend the marriage feast. Eventually, in the new heaven and the new earth the significant aspect will be

righteousness. This is the development and harvest of the matter of righteousness.

There are five other points included in this matter of righteousness. The seed of being reconciled as opposed to not killing is developed in Colossians 3:13: “Bearing one another and forgiving one another, if anyone should have a complaint against anyone; even as the Lord forgave you, so also should you forgive.” Perhaps the single brothers and sisters and also the husbands and wives need to pray-read this verse. Then Ephesians 4:32 says, “Be kind to one another, tenderhearted, forgiving one another, even as God in Christ also forgave you.” This is the development of the seed of reconciliation.

The seed of the purity of the children of the kingdom of the heavens is developed in 1 Thessalonians 4:3-4: “This is the will of God, your sanctification: that you abstain from fornication; that each one of you know how to possess his own vessel in sanctification and honor.” First Timothy 5:2 says, “Elderly women as mothers, younger women as sisters, in all purity.” Paul exhorted Timothy to deal with the younger sisters in all purity. This is purity not only of the body but also of the inward parts of our being.

In Matthew 5:34-37 the Lord Jesus said, “I tell you not to swear at all.” This seed is developed in James 5:12: “Above all things, my brothers, do not swear, neither by heaven nor by earth nor with any other oath; but let your yes be yes, and your no, no, lest you fall under judgment.” The word of the apostle James is nearly the same as that of the Lord Jesus. It may be that James still remembered what the Lord Jesus had said on the mount. Ephesians 4:25 also develops this seed of not swearing: “Therefore having put off the lie, speak truth each one with his neighbor, for we are members one of another.” Because we are members one of another, we should put off the lie and speak truth each one with his neighbor. We all need to learn to be simple and to answer yes, yes or no, no.

In Matthew 5:39 is the seed of not resisting an evil person: “I tell you not to resist him who is evil.” This seed is developed in Romans 12:14: “Bless those who persecute you; bless and do not curse.” It continues in 12:17: “Repay no one evil for evil; take forethought for things honorable in the sight of all men.” Paul develops this point further in 1 Corinthians 4:12b-13a: “Reviled we bless; persecuted we endure; defamed we exhort.” First Corinthians 6:7 says,

“Already then it is altogether a defeat to you that you have lawsuits with one another. Why not rather be wronged? Why not rather be defrauded?”

The seed of loving your enemy is sown in Matthew 5:43-46 and developed in Romans 12:20-21: “‘If your enemy is hungry, feed him; if he is thirsty, give him a drink; for in doing this you will heap coals of fire upon his head.’ Do not be conquered by evil, but conquer evil with good.”

THE PURITY OF THE CHILDREN OF THE KINGDOM IN THEIR GOOD DEEDS

In Matthew 6 the Lord Jesus told us what our attitude should be toward giving, praying, and fasting. We should give in a secret way so that we will not receive the glory of men. We need to pray in a private way so that our Father who sees in secret may repay us. Furthermore, when we fast, we should anoint our head and wash our face so that we may not appear to men to be fasting. These seeds are developed in several verses. Galatians 5:26 says, “Let us not become vainglorious, provoking one another, envying one another.” We should not be desirous of vainglory, that is, of making a show. Philippians 2:3a says, “Doing nothing by way of selfish ambition nor by way of vainglory.” Concerning prayer, 1 Thessalonians 5:17 says, “Unceasingly pray.” Then Romans 12:12 says, “Rejoice in hope, endure in tribulation; persevere in prayer.” Concerning fasting, Acts 13:3 says, “When they had fasted and prayed and laid their hands on them, they sent them away.” These verses may be considered as the growth and development of the words spoken by the Lord Jesus in Matthew 6.

THE ATTITUDE OF THE CHILDREN OF THE KINGDOM TOWARD RICHES

Concerning riches, the Lord Jesus told us in Matthew 6 that we should not store up for ourselves treasures on the earth but that we should store up for ourselves treasures in heaven. Furthermore, He said that we cannot serve two masters. Either we will hate the one and love the other, or we will hold to one and despise the other. We cannot serve God and mammon.

The Lord also said that we should not be anxious for our life, what we should eat or what we should drink, and what clothes we should put on. Our heavenly Father knows that we need all these things. There is no need for us

to be anxious about them. If we seek first His kingdom and His righteousness, all these things will be added to us. We can see a development of this seed in Acts 4:32: “The heart and soul of the multitude of those who had believed was one; and not even one said that any of his possessions was his own, but all things were common to them.” It continues in verses 34 and 35: “Neither was anyone among them in need; for as many as were owners of lands or of houses sold them and brought the proceeds of the things which were sold and placed them at the feet of the apostles; and it was distributed to each, as anyone had need.” From these verses it is clear that the believers in the early church were not anxious concerning material things. Their attitude toward their riches was so liberated, so free. On the contrary, people in the world anxiously grasp everything they possess. We Christians should not be like that. We need to be liberated from the possession of material things.

Paul then quotes the Lord Jesus when he says, “It is more blessed to give than to receive” (Acts 20:35). Our attitude should be that we love to give rather than receive. First Timothy 6:8-10 says, “Having food and covering, with these we will be content. But those who intend to be rich fall into temptation and a snare and many foolish and harmful desires, which plunge men into destruction and ruin. For the love of money is a root of all evils, because of which some, aspiring after money, have been led away from the faith and pierced themselves through with many pains.” We should not love money but should be content when we have something to eat and something to wear. Verses 17 through 19 continue by saying, “Charge those who are rich in the present age not to be high-minded, nor to set their hope on the uncertainty of riches but on God, who affords us all things richly for our enjoyment; to do good, to be rich in good works, to be ready to distribute, to be ones willing to share; laying away for themselves a good foundation as a treasure for the future, that they may lay hold on that which is really life.” Finally, let us read Romans 12:13a: “Contribute to the needs of the saints.” This means that whenever there is a need among the saints and we have the ability to give something, we should do so. We all must keep such a proper attitude toward riches.

THE PRINCIPLES OF THE CHILDREN OF THE KINGDOM IN DEALING WITH OTHERS

In Matthew the Lord Jesus told us that we should not judge others (7:1-5). This seed is developed in 1 Corinthians 4:5a: "Do not judge anything before the time, until the Lord comes." If we judge others, we also shall be judged. Now let us read Romans 14:10-13: "But you, why do you judge your brother? Or you, why do you despise your brother? For we will all stand before the judgment seat of God, for it is written, 'As I live, says the Lord, every knee shall bow to Me, and every tongue shall openly confess to God.' So then each one of us will give an account concerning himself to God. Therefore let us judge one another no longer, but rather judge this: not to put a stumbling block or cause of falling before your brother." James 5:9 says, "Do not complain, brothers, against one another lest you be judged. Behold, the Judge stands before the doors." James 2:13 says, "The judgment is without mercy to him who has shown no mercy; mercy triumphs over judgment." These verses show that if we judge others or criticize others, we are short of mercy. We must remember that if we are unmerciful to others now, one day the Lord Jesus will also be unmerciful to us.

THE GROUND OF THE CHILDREN OF THE KINGDOM FOR THEIR WALK AND WORK

The Narrow Gate and the Constricted Way

The first ground sown by the Lord Jesus as a seed is the narrow gate and the constricted way. The proper Christian life is surely narrow. This seed is developed in 1 Corinthians 4:9b-13: "We have become a spectacle to the world, both to angels and to men. We are fools because of Christ, but you are prudent in Christ; we are weak, but you are strong; you are glorious, but we are dishonored. Until the present hour we both hunger and thirst, and are naked and buffeted and wander without a home; and we labor, working with our own hands. Reviled we bless; persecuted we endure; defamed we exhort. We have become as the offscouring of the world, the scum of all things, until now." After reading these verses, could we consider that the apostle Paul took a broad way? Surely he took a narrow gate with a constricted way.

In 2 Corinthians 11:23b-27 Paul says, "In labors more abundantly, in imprisonments more abundantly, in stripes excessively, in deaths often. Under the hands of the Jews five times I received forty stripes less one; three times I was beaten with rods, once I was stoned, three times I was shipwrecked, a night and a day I have spent in the deep; in journeys often, in

dangers of rivers, in dangers of robbers, in dangers from my race, in dangers from the Gentiles, in dangers in the city, in dangers in the wilderness, in dangers in the sea, in dangers among false brothers; in labor and hardship; in watchings often; in hunger and thirst; in fastings often; in cold and nakedness." Paul's living, walk, and work could stand because they were built upon a solid foundation. He did not take the broad way but the constricted way. If we take the broad way, our walk, our work, and our living cannot stand the test. One day the rains will fall, the flood will come, and the winds will blow. Then what we are and what we have done will be damaged.

Fruit Brought Forth of Life

The second seed that the Lord Jesus sowed concerning the ground of the children of the kingdom for their walk and work is the matter of fruit brought forth of life (Matt. 7:15-20). This seed is developed in Galatians 5:22-23: "The fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, long-suffering, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, meekness, self-control; against such things there is no law." These items are not simply outward conduct; they are the fruit of the Spirit by life. Let us also read Ephesians 5:8-9: "You were once darkness but are now light in the Lord; walk as children of light (for the fruit of the light consists in all goodness and righteousness and truth)." The fruit of the light is also the fruit of the Spirit.

The Will of God

The third ground of the children of the kingdom is the will of God. This seed is sown by the Lord Jesus in Matthew 7:21 and is developed in Romans 12:2: "Do not be fashioned according to this age, but be transformed by the renewing of the mind that you may prove what the will of God is, that which is good and well pleasing and perfect." According to the context of Romans 12, it is clear that the will of God is to have the Body life, the church, or we may say the kingdom. The kingdom is the will of God, and the church is the kingdom.

The Word of Christ

The word of Christ as a ground for the children of the kingdom is sown in Matthew 7:24 and developed in Colossians 3:16: "Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly in all wisdom, teaching and admonishing one another with psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing with grace in your hearts to

God." First we need to be filled with the word of Christ; then we need to live out the word of Christ. The very word of Christ becomes the ground for our living, our walk, and our work.

THE SEED OF THE BUILDING DEVELOPED IN THE EPISTLES AND REVELATION

Have you ever noticed that the Lord Jesus ended His discourse on the mount with a building? The Sermon on the Mount ends with a building. The Lord Jesus said that we must build our house on the solid ground which is able to stand testing from three directions. It can stand testing in the form of rains from the heavens, rivers from the earth, and winds from the air. We have mentioned previously that these signify tests from God, from man, and from the enemy, Satan. These three tests are tests upon the building. What we are, what we do, and our work for the Lord are related to the building. Eventually, the whole Bible ends with a building, New Jerusalem. Matthew 5, 6, and 7 contain this seed. Then the Epistles and Revelation have the growth and the harvest of the seed of the building.

In Matthew 7 the building is mentioned only briefly, but in the Epistles there is much development. First Corinthians 3:12-14 says, "If anyone builds upon the foundation gold, silver, precious stones, wood, grass, stubble, the work of each will become manifest; for the day will declare it, because it is revealed by fire, and the fire itself will prove each one's work, of what sort it is. If anyone's work which he has built upon the foundation remains, he will receive a reward." This is a further development of the building from Matthew 7.

For the harvest of the seed of the building, we need to read Revelation 21:10-11, 18-21: "He carried me away in spirit onto a great and high mountain and showed me the holy city, Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, having the glory of God. Her light was like a most precious stone, like a jasper stone, as clear as crystal...And the building work of its wall was jasper; and the city was pure gold, like clear glass. The foundations of the wall of the city were adorned with every precious stone: the first foundation was jasper; the second, sapphire; the third, chalcedony; the fourth, emerald; the fifth, sardonyx; the sixth, sardius; the seventh, chrysolite; the eighth, beryl; the ninth, topaz; the tenth, chrysoprase; the eleventh, jacinth; the twelfth, amethyst. And the twelve gates were twelve pearls; each one of the gates was,

respectively, of one pearl. And the street of the city was pure gold, like transparent glass."

The Lord's discourse in Matthew 5—7 begins with our being poor in spirit and concludes with the building. I believe many Christians have never seen that the Lord's discourse on the mount consummates with the building. In the reality of the kingdom, what we are, what we do, and what work we accomplish must be for the building. Otherwise, our work can never stand solidly; what we have done will either be destroyed or burned.

The New Jerusalem will be the consummation of God's building work in our building. God builds through our building. You may consider that you cannot build. But Paul says, "I have laid the foundation" (1 Cor. 3:10). He said that we all need to build on this foundation and that we need to take heed how we build. This means that we can build something. The building is not just a kind of work. It also must be our daily walk and our daily living. All these things will be in the building. In Matthew 7 the building was a little seed. In the Epistles there was the development and growth of the seed. The Epistles contain many verses concerning the development of the building. Eventually, the building consummates with the New Jerusalem. The New Jerusalem is the harvest of the building.

The life of the reality of the kingdom is for the building. We know this because the conclusion of the Lord's word in His discourse on the mount concerning the reality of the kingdom is the building. What we are, what we do, and all our work must be for the building. We must take heed what we build and how we build. We may build something that will not stand the test from God. We may be able to stand the test from man or even from Satan, but we can never stand the test from God. If we live in the reality of the kingdom and if we walk and work according to the inner life, taking Christ as our life, eventually we will build up something that can stand the test from every direction. Eventually, all the building will become consummately God's eternal building, the New Jerusalem.

CHRIST AS OUR LIFE

We should not consider that all these aspects of the reality of the kingdom are something we ourselves can work out. No! It is impossible for us to work out even one little point. We need to realize that all these aspects and points

signify this one thing: Christ as our life within. All these aspects and all these points are simply a complete expression of Christ. Hallelujah! Christ has come in! Christ is now within us as our life. We simply need to open ourselves to Him, to cooperate with Him, to take Him in and enjoy Him, and to let Him out. Then we will experience all the aspects and all the points. This is the reality of the kingdom.

We have already seen that in Daniel 2 a stone became a great mountain. That stone signifies the Lord Jesus, and the mountain signifies the kingdom, filling the earth. We all have to realize that the stone is within us. Christ, the building stone, is within us. This stone within us will be enlarged as we take Him as our nourishment and our enjoyment. When He is manifested from within us at His coming back, that will be the reality of the kingdom. The kingdom will simply be the enlargement of the indwelling Christ. The kingdom life that has been planted into us will consummate with the building. The Gospels show that the Lord Jesus is sown into us as the seed of the kingdom, and the Epistles show how the seed grows and develops within us. Finally, Revelation shows how the growth consummates with a building, New Jerusalem. Praise the Lord! This is the kingdom! This is the Lord Jesus as the seed, the growth, and the harvest of the reality of the kingdom.

CHAPTER FORTY-FOUR

THE GROWTH AND HARVEST OF THE APPEARANCE OF THE KINGDOM

In the last chapter we covered the growth and harvest of the reality of the kingdom. In this chapter we will cover the growth and harvest of the appearance of the kingdom. The appearance of the kingdom is mainly revealed in Matthew 13 in three parables: the parable of the tares, the parable of the mustard herb becoming a great tree, and the parable of the leaven. These parables cover three very negative things.

THE TARES

First, we need to see some of the verses concerning the tares, the false Christians. These are the Christians in name only, the nominal Christians. Today there are very many nominal Christians. However, some people are indifferent, considering that it does not make much difference whether Christians are real or false. This is very serious. Actually, to be a false Christian is even worse than to be a person without the name of a Christian. As we have seen in a previous chapter, when the Lord Jesus comes back, the first group of people He will deal with in a severe way will be the false Christians. The Lord Jesus will send His angels to bind the tares into bundles and to throw all of them into the lake of fire. The Antichrist and the false prophet will be thrown alive into the lake of fire, and the fact that the false believers will also be thrown alive into the lake of fire shows how serious a matter it is. The Lord Jesus clearly said He would bind them into bundles and throw them into the fire, which means the lake of fire. Today many pastors and ministers are indifferent as to whether their members are real Christians or false ones. As long as they have a good membership, a good crowd, and good attendance, and as long as the money is coming in, they are satisfied. But we must come to the Word of God to see how serious it is to be a false Christian.

In the Acts

Acts 20:29-30 says, “I know that after my departure fierce wolves will come in among you, not sparing the flock. And from among you yourselves men will rise up, speaking perverted things to draw away the disciples after them.” Do you think that these are real believers or false ones? The Bible says that they are wolves. Even in the first century during the time of the apostle Paul, he told the elders of the church in Ephesus that some fierce wolves would come in among the church, not sparing the flock. He said that some of these would even rise up from among them to speak perverted things to draw away disciples after them. Surely these are tares.

In Romans

Romans 16:17-18 says, “Now I exhort you, brothers, to mark those who make divisions and causes of stumbling contrary to the teaching which you have learned, and turn away from them. For such men do not serve our Lord Christ, but their own stomach, and through smooth words and flattering speech deceive the hearts of the simple.” Do not consider that all Christians are sheep; some are wolves. These verses tell us that we need to keep a watchful eye on those who make divisions and causes of stumbling. By smooth words and flattering speech they deceive the hearts of the simple. Can you believe that these are real Christians? Surely, they must be the tares. They are false, and they deceive others for the sake of their own stomach. They do not serve the Lord; they serve their own stomach. Their god is their stomach.

In 2 Corinthians

Let us also read 2 Corinthians 11:13-15: “Such ones are false apostles, deceitful workers, transfiguring themselves into apostles of Christ. And no wonder, for Satan himself transfigures himself into an angel of light. Therefore it is no great thing if also his ministers transfigure themselves into ministers of righteousness, whose end will be according to their works.” These verses say that there are some false apostles. Surely they are tares, and they are ministers of the enemy, Satan. Some ministers today are not ministers of God but ministers of the enemy. The word *transfiguring* in verse 13 means “fashioning.” They fashion themselves into the apostles of Christ. It is not a real transfiguration but an outward fashioning.

The last part of 2 Corinthians 11:26 says, “In dangers among false brothers.” This verse shows that false brothers became a peril to the apostle Paul, and he

suffered because of them. Truly, if we have false brothers in the church, they will really be a kind of suffering and a real peril to us.

In Galatians

Galatians 2:4-5 also develops this matter of the tares: “And this, because of the false brothers, brought in secretly, who stole in to spy out our freedom which we have in Christ Jesus, that they might bring us into slavery. To them we yielded with the subjection demanded not even for an hour, that the truth of the gospel might remain with you.” The false brothers stole in secretly like a snake in order to damage and poison.

In Philippians

Paul mentions the same kind of thing in Philippians: “Beware of the dogs, beware of the evil workers, beware of the concision” (3:2). Who are the dogs mentioned here? They are false preachers. In the name of Christ they preached something concerning the circumcision. This means they were dogs, false Christians. Philippians 3:18-19 goes on to say, “For many walk, of whom I have told you often and now tell you even weeping, that they are the enemies of the cross of Christ, whose end is destruction, whose god is their stomach, and whose glory is in their shame, who set their minds on earthly things.” These also are false ones. They are enemies of the cross of Christ, and their god is their stomach. All these kinds of people are tares.

In 1 Timothy

First Timothy 1:19-20 says, “Holding faith and a good conscience, concerning which some, thrusting these away, have become shipwrecked regarding the faith; of whom are Hymenaeus and Alexander, whom I have delivered to Satan that they may be disciplined not to blaspheme.” Do you think that Hymenaeus and Alexander were real Christians? Even the Bible indicates that they were evil ones. No doubt they were terrible tares.

In 2 Timothy

Second Timothy 4:14-15 mentions Alexander the coppersmith again: “Alexander the coppersmith did many evil things to me; the Lord will recompense him according to his works. You also guard against him, for he

greatly opposed our words." *Evil things* here means damage—Alexander did Paul much damage.

In Hebrews

Now let us read Hebrews 12:15: "Looking carefully lest anyone fall away from the grace of God; lest any root of bitterness springing up trouble you, and through this many be defiled." The root of bitterness here indicates some persons who may spring up to trouble and defile you. They will become persons of bitterness. No doubt these are the false ones.

In 2 Peter

"There arose also false prophets among the people, as also among you there will be false teachers, who will secretly bring in destructive heresies, even denying the Master who bought them, bringing upon themselves swift destruction. And many will follow their licentiousness, because of whom the way of the truth will be reviled. And in covetousness, with fabricated words, they will make merchandise of you, for whom the judgment of old is not idle, and their destruction does not slumber" (2 Pet. 2:1-3). This is really terrible! Surely these were the false Christians, the tares.

From the same chapter we read verse 15: "Forsaking the straight way, they have gone astray, following the way of Balaam, the son of Beor, who loved the wages of unrighteousness." Then verses 17 through 22 say, "These are springs without water and mists driven by a storm, for whom the gloom of darkness is kept. For uttering great swelling words of vanity, they entice by lusts of the flesh, with licentiousness, those who are barely escaping from them who live in error; promising freedom to them, while they themselves are slaves of corruption; for by whom anyone has been defeated, by this one he has been enslaved. For if, having escaped the defilements of the world by the knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ but having again been entangled in these, they are defeated, the last state has become worse for them than the first. For it would be better for them not to have known the way of righteousness than, knowing it, to turn back from the holy commandment delivered to them. It has happened to them according to the true proverb: The dog has turned to its own vomit, and the washed sow to wallowing in the mud." Here are unclean and dirty things: dogs and swine. What awful, terrible, and ugly terms are used to describe these kinds of false Christians:

the wolves, the dogs, and the swine. These three awful things are tares among the Christians. The wolf is so damaging, and the dogs and swine are so dirty.

In 1 John

The tares are further developed in 1 John 2:18-19: “Young children, it is the last hour; and even as you heard that antichrist is coming, even now many antichrists have come; whereby we know that it is the last hour. They went out from us, but they were not of us; for if they had been of us, they would have remained with us; but they went out that they might be manifested that they all are not of us.” These are the people who are against Christ, so they are called antichrist. There is not only the Antichrist in the future but also some little ones who were there already. Because they went out and did not remain with the early church, it proves they were the false ones, the tares. First John 4:1 says, “Beloved, do not believe every spirit, but prove the spirits whether they are of God, because many false prophets have gone out into the world.” If there were many false prophets in the early days, how about today? Do you believe that today there are no false prophets? Surely there are more false prophets now than in the first century.

In 2 John

Now let us read 2 John 7: “Many deceivers went out into the world, those who do not confess Jesus Christ coming in the flesh. This is the deceiver and the antichrist.” Such persons did not confess that the Lord Jesus was God incarnated to be a man. Today there are also persons just like this. Verses 9 through 11 continue: “Everyone who goes beyond and does not abide in the teaching of Christ does not have God; he who abides in the teaching, he has both the Father and the Son. If anyone comes to you and does not bring this teaching, do not receive him into your house, and do not say to him, Rejoice! For he who says to him, Rejoice, shares in his evil works.” Today some go beyond, not abiding in the teaching of Christ. This means they do not believe that the Lord Jesus is God, that He died on the cross for our redemption, that He was resurrected, and that today He is in the heavens. And, of course, they do not believe that He will come again a second time. This is very serious, and because they have gone so far, we are told that we should not receive them into our houses to eat with them and even that we should not greet them. This is quite serious before the Lord. We should not be indifferent concerning such people.

In Jude

The book of Jude also develops the seed of the tares. Verse 4 says, “Certain men have crept in unnoticed, who of old have been written of beforehand for this judgment, ungodly men, perverting the grace of our God into licentiousness and denying our only Master and Lord, Jesus Christ.” Here the word *crept* is used. Certain men crept in. Today it is the same. Some creep into the church life with the intention of damaging the church. Surely these are the false ones.

Then let us continue in Jude with verses 8 through 16: “Nevertheless in like manner these dreamers also defile the flesh and despise lordship and revile dignities. But Michael the archangel, when he contended with the devil and disputed concerning the body of Moses, did not dare to bring a reviling judgment against him but said, The Lord rebuke you. But these revile the things that they do not know; and the things that they understand naturally, like animals without reason, in these they are being corrupted. Woe to them! For they have gone in the way of Cain and have rushed out in the error of Balaam for reward and have perished in the rebellion of Korah. These are the hidden reefs in your love feasts, feasting together with you without fear, shepherding themselves; waterless clouds being carried off by winds; autumn trees without fruit, having died twice, rooted up; wild waves of the sea, foaming out their own shames; wandering stars, for whom the gloom of darkness is kept for eternity. And Enoch, the seventh from Adam, prophesied also of these, saying, Behold, the Lord came with myriads of His saints to execute judgment against all and to convict all the ungodly concerning all their ungodly works which they have done in ungodliness, and concerning all the hard things which ungodly sinners have spoken against Him. These are murmurers, complainers, going on according to their own lusts; and their mouth speaks great swelling things, flattering persons for the sake of advantage.” Surely all these are tares, and according to the prophecy of Enoch, the Lord will first deal with them.

Then continuing with verses 17 through 19: “But you, beloved, remember the words spoken before by the apostles of our Lord Jesus Christ, that they said to you, In the last time there will be mockers, going on according to their own lusts for ungodliness. These are those who make divisions, soulish, having no spirit.” Again these are the false ones.

In Revelation

Now let us read Revelation 2:2b: "You have tried those who call themselves apostles and are not, and have found them to be false." Have you ever realized that there are so many verses in the New Testament concerning the tares? There are not only verses concerning laymen as tares but also clergy as tares. In fact, most of the tares mentioned in these books are in the clerical class, the ministers. They are not the ministers of God but ministers of Satan. In the Lord's recovery we must be on the alert against this kind of falsehood. I do hope that the leading brothers in all the churches will read and pray-read these verses into them until they realize the facts concerning the false teachers, prophets, and ministers. Could you imagine that some false ones would even claim to be apostles? All these verses concern the situation in the early church at the time of the apostles. But today surely the situation is even worse.

THE GREAT TREE

Although we will read only a few verses concerning the development of the great tree, they are all very, very significant. First, we need to read Revelation 2:12-13: "To the messenger of the church in Pergamos write: These things says He who has the sharp two-edged sword: I know where you dwell, where Satan's throne is; and you hold fast My name and have not denied My faith, even in the days of Antipas, My witness, My faithful one, who was killed among you, where Satan dwells." Although these two verses do not mention the great tree, they do have the word *Pergamos,* which means "a fortified tower." Actually, *Pergamos* has two meanings: one is "a fortified tower," and the other is "marriage." Literally, it means "marriage," and symbolically, it means "a fortified tower." These two meanings are very significant. According to church history, the church in Pergamos represents the state of the church beginning in the fourth century. At the beginning of the fourth century, A.D. 313, Constantine, the emperor of the Roman Empire, embraced Christianity as his religion, causing the church to become very great. By the marriage of the Roman Empire with the church, the church increased greatly in both numbers and popularity. Before that time, Satan had persecuted the church, but the way of persecution accomplished nothing. Eventually, Satan realized his tactic was ineffective. The more he persecuted the church, the more he was defeated. So he subtly changed his tactics from persecuting to welcoming. Constantine welcomed Christianity into the Roman Empire. The persecuted

church became a welcomed church. The result was that many, many unbelievers were baptized into Christianity, causing Christianity to become a great tree full of false ones. Formerly, it was a mustard herb, small and good for food. From A.D. 313 it became a great tree containing many evil things, evil persons, and even evil spirits. Many evil things come to lodge in the branches of the great tree.

The harvest of the seed of the great tree is in Revelation 18:2: "And He cried with a strong voice, saying, Fallen, fallen is Babylon the Great! And she has become a dwelling place of demons and a hold of every unclean spirit and a hold of every unclean and hateful bird." It is very meaningful that the reality of the kingdom ends with a city, and the appearance of the kingdom also ends with a city. The reality of the kingdom will consummate with a holy city, the New Jerusalem, but the appearance of the kingdom will consummate with a great city, Babylon the Great. Although the New Jerusalem is not small, the Bible does not call it the great city. The New Jerusalem is the holy city, not the great city (21:10). God does not care for something great; He cares for something holy. The church should not be great but holy. We are the holy church, not the great church. The New Jerusalem is God's building, and the great Babylon is the enemy Satan's building. The great tree in Matthew 13 will be fully developed into that great city, Babylon, which is full of leaven, pollution, corruption, and all kinds of evil things.

LEAVEN

In the Acts

Now we need to see the evil things that are contained within the great Babylon. These things may be considered as leaven. First, we need to read Acts 5:1-11: "A certain man named Ananias, with Sapphira his wife, sold a piece of property and put aside for himself some of the proceeds, his wife also being aware of it. And he brought some part of it and laid it at the feet of the apostles. But Peter said, Ananias, why has Satan filled your heart to deceive the Holy Spirit and to put aside for yourself some of the proceeds of the land? While it remained, was it not your own? And when it was sold, was it not under your authority? Why is it that you have contrived this thing in your heart? You have not lied to men but to God. And when Ananias heard these words, he fell down and expired; and great fear came upon all those who heard this. And the young men arose and wrapped him up; and carrying him

out, they buried him. And it happened that after an interval of about three hours, his wife, not knowing what had happened, came in. And Peter answered her, Tell me whether you have sold the land for this much? And she said, Yes, for this much. And Peter said to her, Why is it that it was agreed between you two to test the Spirit of the Lord? Behold, the feet of those who have buried your husband are at the door, and they will carry you out. And she fell down instantly at his feet and expired. And the young men came in and found her dead; and carrying her out, they buried her with her husband. And great fear came upon the whole church and upon all those who heard these things."

We may say that this is the first record of leaven creeping into the church life. What kind of leaven was this? This leaven may be considered as hypocrisy, falsehood, or simply a kind of showing off. They did something to make a show. Although they were not that consecrated, they made a pretense of consecration. This is the first leaven that Satan attempted to put into the church life. This account shows us that in the church life we must be pure. We must be in the reality of the kingdom, and we must be pure in our doing good. If we would do good, we should not blow a trumpet or make a show. It is better for us to hide ourselves when we do good. We should not pretend. We should not seek after vainglory. We all must be careful today. Especially with the matter of money, there is a great temptation. Either we would not give at all, or we would give in a way to seek glory. That is leaven. We must be careful. All the leading brothers must be alert to keep the door shut against this kind of thing. Sometimes when people donate something to the church, they have an attitude of seeking vainglory. This is the first leaven that crept into the church life.

Another account of leaven creeping into the church is found in Acts 8:18-23: "When Simon saw that through the laying on of the hands of the apostles the Spirit was given, he offered them money, saying, Give me also this authority that on whomever I lay my hands he may receive the Holy Spirit. But Peter said to him, May your silver go with you into destruction, because you thought that you would acquire the gift of God through money. You have no part nor lot in this matter, for your heart is not straight before God. Repent therefore from this wickedness of yours and beseech the Lord if perhaps the intent of your heart may be forgiven you; for I see that you are in the gall of bitterness and in the bond of unrighteousness." For Simon to consider that the gift of God could be purchased with money indicated that his heart was

not right. This too was a kind of leaven, related not only to money but also to pride. Simon wanted to be able to lay his hands on people for them to receive the Holy Spirit. He wanted to be somebody. This kind of leaven is very subtle, and it is within us all.

Acts 15:1 reads, “Certain men came down from Judea and began to teach the brothers, Unless you are circumcised according to the custom of Moses, you cannot be saved.” To teach in this way is a kind of leaven. It is the leaven of a wrong teaching. On the one hand, we do not care that much for the doctrines, but on the other hand, we must be alert that no improper doctrines could come in to damage the church life.

In 1 Corinthians

In 1 Corinthians 5:1-2 more leaven is mentioned: “It is actually reported that there is fornication among you, and such fornication that does not even occur among the Gentiles, that someone has his stepmother. And you are puffed up? And have you not rather mourned, that the one who has done this deed might be removed from your midst?” Then verses 6 through 8 say, “Your boasting is not good. Do you not know that a little leaven leavens the whole lump? Purge out the old leaven that you may be a new lump, even as you are unleavened; for our Passover, Christ, also has been sacrificed. So then let us keep the feast, not with old leaven, neither with the leaven of malice and evil, but with the unleavened bread of sincerity and truth.”

Verses 11 through 13 continue: “Now I have written to you not to mingle with anyone who is called a brother, if he is a fornicator or a covetous man or an idolater or a reviler or a drunkard or a rapacious man, with such a one not even to eat. For what have I to do with judging those who are outside the church? Do you not judge those who are within the church? But those who are outside, God will judge. Remove the evil man from among yourselves.” We must realize that the Lord will never allow this kind of wicked person to stay in the church life. They must be put away. In a sense, they must be chased away, even excommunicated. Thus, we can see that there are two kinds of persons with whom we should not fellowship. First are the antichrists like those mentioned in 2 John, who have gone beyond and do not abide in the teaching of Christ. The antichrists do not believe that Christ is God or that Christ is the Son of God. They do not believe that Christ died on the cross to accomplish redemption, was resurrected, and today is enthroned in the

heavens. These are the antichrists. We should not greet them, and we should not grant them hospitality. The second are the wicked persons who are mentioned in 1 Corinthians. We should not allow them to remain among us unless they repent, because it is an insult to the testimony of God. If we allow such wicked persons to remain in the church life, it will become dirty, polluted, and insulted, and we will lose the testimony of God. We must be alert not to receive any antichrists and not to allow any wicked persons to remain among us. The church must be clear of all these dark things.

In Galatians

We can see the seed of leaven developed also in Galatians 1:6-9: "I marvel that you are so quickly removing from Him who has called you in the grace of Christ to a different gospel, which is not another gospel, only there are some who trouble you and desire to pervert the gospel of Christ. But if even we or an angel out of heaven should announce to you a gospel beyond that which we have announced to you, let him be accursed. As we have said before, now also I say again, If anyone announces to you a gospel beyond that which you have received, let him be accursed." Surely that kind of gospel which was beyond the gospel that Paul preached is a kind of leaven.

In Ephesians

Ephesians 4:14 indicates that even teachings from the Bible may become a kind of leaven if used improperly. "That we may be no longer little children tossed by waves and carried about by every wind of teaching in the sleight of men, in craftiness with a view to a system of error." We must realize that a wind of teaching can corrupt the church life. It is not wise to emphasize teaching too much; if we do, we will become leavened.

In Philippians

Philippians 1:15a says, "Some preach Christ even because of envy and strife." Even with the preaching of Christ, there could be some leaven. The preaching of Christ is good, but the envy and strife is a kind of leaven. Then verse 17a says, "The others announce Christ out of selfish ambition, not purely." Here is the preaching of Christ plus rivalry as a kind of leaven.

In Colossians

The book of Colossians also develops the matter of the leaven. In 2:8 it says, "Beware that no one carries you off as spoil through his philosophy and empty deceit, according to the tradition of men, according to the elements of the world, and not according to Christ." The philosophy of men is a kind of leaven. Colossians 2:18-19a says, "Let no one defraud you by judging you unworthy of your prize, in self-chosen lowliness and the worship of the angels, dwelling on the things which he has seen, vainly puffed up by his mind set on the flesh, and not holding the Head." Even not holding the Head is a kind a leaven. We all must hold the Head, Christ.

Verses 20b through 23 continue: "Why, as living in the world, do you subject yourselves to ordinances: do not handle, nor taste, nor touch, (regarding things which are all to perish when used) according to the commandments and teachings of men? Such things indeed have a reputation of wisdom in self-imposed worship and lowliness and severe treatment of the body, but are not of any value against the indulgence of the flesh." The self-imposed humility, the worship of the angels, and the appearance of wisdom are a kind of leaven.

In 2 Thessalonians

We can also see the leaven in 2 Thessalonians. In 2:2 we read, "That you be not quickly shaken in mind nor alarmed, neither by a spirit nor by word nor by a letter as if by us, to the effect that the day of the Lord has come." In the ancient times, some pretended to be authorities in speaking or writing something concerning the Lord's coming back. This is a kind of leaven. "Let no one deceive you in any way, because it will not come unless the apostasy comes first and the man of lawlessness is revealed, the son of perdition" (v. 3). All the means of deceiving the Lord's children are a kind of leaven.

In 1 Timothy

Paul wrote much to Timothy concerning leaven. First Timothy 1:3-4 says, "Even as I exhorted you, when I was going into Macedonia, to remain in Ephesus in order that you might charge certain ones not to teach different things nor to give heed to myths and unending genealogies, which produce questionings rather than God's economy, which is in faith." Here Paul considers different teachings, myths, and the genealogies as leaven. Then verses 6 and 7 say, "From which things some, having misaimed, have turned

aside to vain talking, desiring to be teachers of the law, though they understand neither the things that they say, nor concerning what they confidently affirm." Desiring to be a teacher is a kind of leaven. If you teach something that you do not know, that teaching is also a kind of leaven.

Then we go to 4:1-3: "The Spirit says expressly that in later times some will depart from the faith, giving heed to deceiving spirits and teachings of demons by means of the hypocrisy of men who speak lies, of men who are branded in their own conscience as with a hot iron, who forbid marriage and command abstaining from foods, which God has created to be partaken of with thanksgiving by those who believe and have full knowledge of the truth." Surely all these items are leaven.

In 2 Timothy

In 2 Timothy 2:16-18 Paul says, "Avoid profane, vain babblings, for they will advance to more ungodliness, and their word will spread like gangrene, of whom are Hymenaeus and Philetus, who concerning the truth have misaimed, saying that the resurrection has already taken place, and overthrow the faith of some." What a leaven this is! They were teaching that the resurrection had already taken place and that there would be no more resurrection. Then verse 20 says, "In a great house there are not only gold and silver vessels but also wooden and earthen; and some are unto honor, and some unto dishonor." No doubt, the wooden and earthen vessels unto dishonor are a kind of leaven.

Now let us read 2 Timothy 3:5-9: "Having an outward form of godliness, though denying its power; from these also turn away. For of these are those who creep into houses and take captive silly women heaped with sins, who are led by various desires and are always learning yet never able to come to the full knowledge of the truth. And in the manner that Jannes and Jambres opposed Moses, so these also oppose the truth; men corrupted in mind, disapproved concerning the faith. But they will not advance farther, for their folly will be completely manifest to all, as also the folly of those became." Surely the corrupt minds, disapproved concerning the faith, are leaven. "But evil men and impostors will grow worse and worse, deceiving and being deceived" (v. 13). The evil men and imposters are leaven. Then 4:3-4 says, "The time will come when they will not tolerate the healthy teaching; but according to their own lusts they will heap up to themselves teachers, having itching ears, and they will turn away their ear from the truth and will be

turned aside to myths." They will not tolerate the healthy teaching. The desire to hear some teaching is a kind of leaven. To have itching ears is a kind of leaven.

In Titus

We can see more leaven in the book of Titus. In 1:10-11 it says, "There are many unruly men, vain talkers and deceivers, especially those of the circumcision, whose mouths must be stopped, who overthrow whole households, teaching things for the sake of base gain, which they ought not to do." Here unruly men and vain talkers and deceivers are mentioned. Surely these are a kind of leaven.

In Hebrews

The leaven is further developed in the book of Hebrews. Hebrews 12:16 reads, "Lest there be any fornicator or profane person like Esau, who for one meal gave up his own birthright." A profane person is leaven. Then Hebrews 13:9 reads, "Do not be carried away by various strange teachings, for it is good for the heart to be confirmed by grace, not by the food of sacrifices, by which those who walk were not profited." Various strange teachings are surely the leaven.

In 3 John

Now let us read 3 John 9-10: "I wrote something to the church; but Diotrephes, who loves to be first among them, does not receive us. For this reason, if I come, I will bring to remembrance his works which he does, babbling against us with evil words; and not being satisfied with these, neither does he himself receive the brothers, and those intending to do so he forbids and casts out of the church." Diotrephes was a person who was desirous for a position of preeminence in the church. Such a person is a kind of leaven in the church life.

In Revelation

Now we come to the harvest of the leaven in the book of Revelation. First, let us read Revelation 2:6: "This you have, that you hate the works of the Nicolaitans, which I also hate." *Nicolaitans* refers to the clergy. The works of the Nicolaitans are the works of the clergy. Their works are a kind of leaven.

Then verses 14 and 15 say, “I have a few things against you, that you have some there who hold the teaching of Balaam, who taught Balak to put a stumbling block before the sons of Israel, to eat idol sacrifices and to commit fornication. In the same way you also have some who hold in like manner the teaching of the Nicolaitans.” There are two kinds of teachings mentioned here: the teaching of Balaam and the teaching of the Nicolaitans. In verse 6 there were the works of the Nicolaitans, but eventually, the works became a kind of teaching. The leaven always comes into the church in this way—first by works and eventually as a kind of teaching. These teachings are a kind of leaven that corrupts the church.

Verses 20 through 24 read, “I have something against you, that you tolerate the woman Jezebel, she who calls herself a prophetess and teaches and leads My slaves astray to commit fornication and to eat idol sacrifices. And I gave her time that she might repent, and she is not willing to repent of her fornication. Behold, I cast her into a bed, and those who commit adultery with her, into great tribulation, unless they repent of her works; and her children I will kill with death; and all the churches will know that I am He who searches the inward parts and the hearts; and I will give to each one of you according to your works. But I say to you—the rest in Thyatira, as many as do not have this teaching, who have not known the deep things of Satan, as they say—I put no other burden upon you.” These verses are a real and accurate description of the Roman Catholic Church. It has the idols, the fornication, the teachings, and the deep things of Satan. All these items are simply leaven. This woman Jezebel is the same woman in Matthew 13 who hid the leaven in the fine flour.

Then we need to read Revelation 17:4-5: “The woman was clothed in purple and scarlet, and gilded with gold and precious stone and pearls, having in her hand a golden cup full of abominations and the unclean things of her fornication. And on her forehead there was a name written, MYSTERY, BABYLON THE GREAT, THE MOTHER OF THE HARLOTS AND THE ABOMINATIONS OF THE EARTH.” This woman held a golden cup, but within it were abominations and the unclean things of her fornication. What a leaven this is! And this leaven is hidden in a golden cup. Outwardly, it appears to have something of God. We know that gold always signifies God’s divine nature. Outwardly, there is the appearance of God, but inwardly, there is much leaven. Babylon the Great is herself a harlot and the mother of many smaller harlots.

No doubt the woman in Matthew 13 is the woman in Revelation 2 and 17. Matthew 13 says clearly that the woman took the leaven and hid it in the fine flour. Fine flour signifies the Lord Jesus as our food. Fine flour was used in making the meal offerings, which typify Christ's humanity. The meal offering was food for both God and the priests. The meal is just Christ Himself. Christ is the fine flour for God's satisfaction and for our satisfaction. But the Roman Catholic Church as that evil woman took leaven and put it into the fine flour. In other words, the Roman Catholic Church took many evil things and added them into the truth of Christ. For example, the birth of Christ is the truth, but the Roman Catholic Church picked up the matter of Christmas and added it to the birth of Christ. We must differentiate between the birth of Christ and Christmas. The birth of Christ is the fine flour, and Christmas is the leaven. In Matthew 1 there is the birth of Christ as the fine flour. Christmas was added as a kind of leaven.

The Roman Catholic Church has repeatedly picked up something evil, pagan, dirty, satanic, and demonic to put into the truth of Christ. It holds a golden cup that in outward appearance seems right, but many abominations and fornications are hiding within. The great Babylon is gilded with gold, precious stone, and pearls. Its appearance is somewhat like the holy city, New Jerusalem. However, the holy city is not gilded with these things; it is actually built with these precious materials. This means that the gold, precious stone, and pearls are not the substance and inward reality of the great Babylon but merely an outward covering. The New Jerusalem, the holy city, is built with these materials as its substance and inward reality. Both within and without there is the gold. But with the great Babylon there is only the appearance of gold covering the inward impurity.

In Matthew there is the seed of the leaven, in the Epistles there is the growth, and eventually in Revelation there is the harvest of the leaven. The harvest of the reality of the kingdom is a city that is pure gold throughout. The harvest of the appearance of the kingdom is also a city, but it is only gilded with gold. This means that the great Babylon is a counterfeit, false city. We must be absolute for the reality of the kingdom and have nothing to do with the appearance of the kingdom.

Which city are you in? I am afraid that you may still hold on to some leaven of the great Babylon. Please spend time to be impressed with all the different kinds of leaven. Praise the Lord that we have seen something concerning the

kingdom! After reading all these chapters, can you say that you have never seen anything concerning the kingdom? Can you say that the chapters in Matthew are still a mystery to you? We have seen the reality of the kingdom, the appearance of the kingdom, and the manifestation of the kingdom. Praise the Lord for the reality and for the manifestation of the kingdom! But be alert and be careful concerning the appearance of the kingdom. We are not for the leaven but for the reality. We are not for Babylon; we are for Jerusalem. This is the pure word of the Lord, and it is so clear to us. The reality of the kingdom issues in the New Jerusalem, and the appearance of the kingdom issues in the great Babylon, the consummation of falsehood.

CHAPTER FORTY-FIVE

THE KINGDOM REVEALED IN HEBREWS

Scripture Reading: Heb. 1:8; 2:10-11, 1-3a; 3:1-3, 14; 4:1, 8-9, 11-12; 5:9-10; 6:1, 4-8; 8:10-11; 9:14; 10:25-31; 12:1-2, 25, 28-29

Now we need to see something concerning the kingdom from the book of Hebrews. With the exception of Matthew and Revelation, Hebrews has more related to the kingdom than any other book in the New Testament. Most Christians have never considered that Hebrews is a book on the kingdom. Many think that Hebrews is simply a book which tells that Christ is superior to all the main items of Judaism. While this is correct, we must realize that Christ is superior to all the items of Judaism for the kingdom. Christ is for the kingdom.

According to the revelation of the New Testament, Christ has come for the kingdom. The concept of most Christians is that Christ came only for our redemption. They never consider that Christ came for the kingdom. While it is true that Christ did come for redemption, redemption is not the goal. Redemption is a process toward the goal. The goal is the kingdom. God's intention is to have a kingdom. God created man in His image so that man could have dominion over all things and express His glory. This means that God created man in His image so that He could have a kingdom.

GOD'S GOAL

God's goal is the kingdom. Even the church is for the kingdom. Why does God need the church? It is because through the church, by the church, with the church, and in the church, God can have a kingdom. God has no other way to get a kingdom for expressing His glory except through the church. These two matters, the church and the kingdom, are closely related in Matthew 16:18-19. In verse 18 the Lord Jesus said that He would build His church, and in the following verse He said that He would give the keys of the kingdom to Peter. The keys of the kingdom are related to the building of the church. The church is builded for the kingdom.

During these years which are near the end of the age, the Lord has burdened us with the matter of the kingdom. We are not here merely for redemption, the gospel, salvation, sanctification, and other things. We are here particularly for the church to bring in the kingdom. We are here for the kingdom. For such a long time, the Lord has been delayed. The Lord Jesus has been seeking the kingdom for over twenty centuries, but still it has not come. The delay is not due to Him but due to us. The problem is that we do not have the adequate maturity of life. For many years we have been stressing one thing: life and the maturity of life. The maturity of life is for the kingdom.

In Matthew Christ is the seed to produce the kingdom. In the first chapter there is such a wonderful One! He is the issue of forty-one generations mingled with the Triune God. His name is Jehovah-plus and God-plus. He is the seed to be worked into all of us. This seed will eventually become the harvest. The seed is Christ, and the harvest is the kingdom.

Please remember the vision in Daniel 2. In that chapter a stone is cut out without hands, which strikes all the Gentile world and eventually becomes a great mountain. The stone in Daniel 2 signifies the Lord Jesus, and the great mountain signifies the kingdom. The stone becomes the mountain, signifying that Christ becomes the kingdom. This indicates that the kingdom is just the enlargement of Christ. It may sound strange to hear that the kingdom is the enlargement of Christ, but according to Daniel 2, the stone became the great mountain. The stone signifies Christ, and the mountain signifies the kingdom.

OLD TESTAMENT TYPES

The Old Testament contains many types of the spiritual things revealed in the New Testament. In fact, nearly every spiritual thing in the New Testament has its type in the Old Testament. The greatest and most all-inclusive type in the Old Testament is the history of Israel. The nation of Israel as a type begins with the first chapter of Exodus and ends with the last book of the Old Testament. First, the nation of Israel experienced the passover in Egypt. We know that the passover in Exodus 12 is a type. Christ is actually our Passover. The passover lamb was slain for them, and its blood was sprinkled on the house. Then they passed through the Red Sea and went into the wilderness where they ate manna and drank the water out of the cleft rock. All these different experiences are types. The passover lamb and even all the aspects of the passover are just Christ. The manna is Christ, and the rock that flowed

with water is also Christ flowing as the life-giving Spirit. Moreover, even the produce of the land of Canaan is a rich type of the all-inclusive Christ. In addition, the whole land of Canaan is an all-inclusive type of Christ.

The book of Hebrews does not tell us that the good land is Christ; instead, it tells us that the good land is a rest. In Hebrews 3 and 4 the good land is revealed as the rest to God's people. They left Egypt, went through the wilderness, passed through the Jordan River, and entered into the good land. Deuteronomy 12:9 calls the good land the rest. But the good land was not merely a rest. God's intention in bringing His people, Israel, into Canaan was not only for rest but for the building up of the kingdom. Not only did God's people need rest, but God Himself wanted a kingdom. God's purpose in bringing His people into the good land of Canaan was to establish His kingdom on the earth. There in the good land God built up a kingdom through, with, and among His people. That was the kingdom of God upon earth.

Before that time, God was the God of heaven (Neh. 1:4), and He was anxious and desirous to come down to earth to express Himself. However, there was a great lack of human coordination. Therefore, He was working, waiting, and expecting to have a group of people who would cooperate with Him. Eventually, He brought His people out from the dominion of Satan, out of Egypt, and through the wilderness into the good land. Ultimately, He defeated all the enemies in the good land through His people, who built the temple and a city. When the city and the temple were built, that was the building of the kingdom. After the temple was completed and at the time it was being dedicated, God's glory filled it. God's glory is just God Himself. God Himself came down from the heavens to get into His habitation. But He obtained not only a house to inhabit but also a city to contain the house. Because of the city, His habitation was accessible and preserved. The city, protecting His dwelling place, signifies the kingdom and authority. God finally had a house upon earth within a city as a symbol of the kingdom in which He could dwell and express Himself. So the good land was not only a type of Christ as rest to God's people but also a type of Christ as the kingdom.

The kingdom is simply the maturity of Christ as life. It is the consummation of our enjoyment of Christ. First, we enjoy Christ as the land, and eventually, what we enjoy of Christ will become the kingdom. When we were first saved, we simply enjoyed the Lord Jesus as a little lamb. At that time we probably

ate only a small portion. From that time we began to eat more and more of the Lord Jesus until eventually we enjoy Him to the full all the time. The ultimate consummation of the enjoyment of Christ is the kingdom. We receive Christ into us as our life, and this life rules in us gradually—a little today and a little more tomorrow. He is so patient. We are growing with Him, and His life is growing with us. One day we will have the maturity of His life, which will be the kingdom.

THE KINGDOM IN HEBREWS

What a wonderful book Hebrews is! It reveals that Christ is superior to every item of Judaism. Such a Christ is eventually the kingdom. Hebrews is a book concerning the kingdom. How can we prove that Hebrews is a book related to the kingdom? Let us read Hebrews 1:8: "Of the Son, 'Your throne, O God, is forever and ever, and the scepter of uprightness is the scepter of Your kingdom.'" This verse says, "Of the Son, 'Your throne'" and "Your kingdom." It does not say Your redemption, Your salvation, Your love, or Your power. The fact that it says "Your throne" and "Your kingdom" indicates the matter of the kingdom.

Let us also read Hebrews 12:28: "Therefore, receiving an unshakable kingdom, let us have grace, through which we may serve God well-pleasingly with piety and fear." Does it say that we are receiving salvation? Or redemption? Or peace? No! It says that we are receiving a kingdom. According to the pure word of the Lord, Hebrews is not merely a book on salvation but on the kingdom. What is the kingdom? The kingdom is the maturity of Christ as life to us, and it is the ultimate consummation of the enjoyment of Christ. Hebrews is a book on the enjoyment of Christ, and this enjoyment will consummate in the kingdom.

SUPERIOR TO THE ANGELS

Hebrews surely shows that Christ is much better than all the items of Judaism. What are the main items of Judaism? First were the angels, through whom the law was given; next were the leaders such as Moses and Joshua; next were the priests such as Aaron; and last was the Old Testament, the old covenant. Under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, the writer of Hebrews compares Christ with all these items, showing that Christ is superior to them. In the first two chapters Christ is compared with the angels. He is much

higher and much superior to the angels because He is both God and man. He is the God-man. He created all things. He tasted death for us, and He destroyed Satan and the authority of death. The Lord Jesus accomplished everything for us, was glorified, and is crowned in the heavens. Presently, He is working to impart Himself into us to make us His brothers. He is the Son of God, and He is making us also into sons of God as His brothers. Now He is bringing us into glory. He did everything for us—He suffered, He delivered, He saved. He is such a wonderful One!

How about the angels? The angels are simply ministering spirits. They cannot compare with Christ. He is such a wonderful One, and He is our salvation. Our salvation is not a "thing" but a wonderful person! Oh, how great a salvation! The writer was short of words to describe this great salvation, so he simply used the word *so*! How great a salvation! It is impossible to describe how great. But the writer says that if we neglect so great a salvation, we will surely suffer something (2:3).

Have you realized that the book of Hebrews was not written to unbelievers but to the Hebrew believers? All of them were saved. But there was a problem—they were distracted from the enjoyment of Christ. They were saved, and they had begun to participate in Christ, but they were in the dangerous position of being distracted away from Christ back to Judaism. If this were to happen, they would lose the enjoyment of Christ in the fullest way. This means that they would neglect so great a salvation. If they were distracted from Christ and should neglect so great a salvation, they would suffer a kind of punishment from the Lord. If we neglect so great a salvation, how can we escape some kind of punishment? Do not think, though, that this means we can lose our salvation. No! Our salvation is for eternity. Once we have been saved, we can never be lost. Hebrews even calls our salvation "eternal salvation" (5:9). But after we have been saved, we need to go on to enjoy Christ more and more until the consummation. It is not a matter of being saved or lost. It is a matter of more and higher enjoyment of Christ. If we neglect the enjoyment of so great a salvation, we will suffer some loss.

SUPERIOR TO MOSES AND JOSHUA

The second section of the book, which is mainly chapters 3 and 4, tells us that Christ is far superior to Moses and Joshua. Both Moses and Joshua were sent by God to lead His people, but Christ is superior to both of them. Moses

was sent by God as an apostle, and Christ is also sent by God; He is our Apostle, our Leader. As such, He is superior to Moses. Moses was God's house, but Christ is the Builder of the house. As the Builder of the house, Christ has more glory than the house itself.

Moses, however, did not bring God's people into the rest. Rather, Joshua brought the people into the rest. Of course, Joshua is the Hebrew name for Jesus. Joshua was a type of Christ who brought the people into the good land. Eventually, both Joshua and the good land are just Christ. Christ as the rest becomes the kingdom.

However, Joshua did not bring the people into the good land by himself. He had a partner whose name was Caleb. According to Hebrews 3:14, we are the Calebs to Christ. We are His partners and companions. The Greek word used here not only means "partakers" but also "partners." Joshua had only one partner, Caleb, but today Christ has many partners. All the members of His Body are His partners. We are partners with Christ in a great corporation. Although the Hebrew Christians had been made partners with Christ, there was the danger that they might be distracted and not enter into the good land. All the people of Israel should have been partners with Joshua, but only one actually went into the good land with Joshua, and that was Caleb. If we are distracted from the enjoyment of Christ, we will no longer be His partners, and we will miss the reward of the manifestation of the kingdom.

Enjoying Christ in Our Spirit

Hebrews 3 and 4 indicate that our progress is in three stages: first we come out of Egypt, then we pass through the wilderness, and finally we enter into the good land. When we arrive in the good land, we are in the rest. Eventually, that will be the kingdom. These three stages—Egypt, the wilderness, and the good land—correspond to the three parts of our entire being. Our body corresponds to Egypt; our soul corresponds to the wilderness; and our spirit, with Christ in it, corresponds to the good land. Before we were saved, we were in Egypt. Once we were saved, we began to wander in the wilderness of the soul. If we will forget about our soul and take care of our spirit, we will enjoy Christ in our spirit as the good land. There we will enjoy Christ as our rest. As we enjoy Him in our spirit, this enjoyment will become the kingdom.

Hebrews 4:12 is very strategic at this point. Verse 11 says that we need to be diligent to enter into the rest, and verse 12 tells us how we may enter into the rest. The way to enter into the rest is to have our spirit discerned and divided from our soul. Today's good land is Christ in our spirit. If we remain in our mind, this means that we are wandering in the wilderness. We must get out of our mind, out of our soul, and into our spirit where Christ is our rest. This rest eventually becomes the kingdom. We should not be in Egypt or in the wilderness. We all must be in the good land, that is, with Christ in our spirit. This means that we should not simply live in our physical body according to the flesh, nor should we live according to our soul. Praise the Lord! There is the possibility for us to get out of our soul and into our spirit. When we get into our spirit, Christ is there. We experience the good land, and we have the rest. We all have experienced that when we were wandering in our soul we had no rest. But once we turned to our spirit, we immediately entered into the rest. In the rest we enjoyed all the riches of the good land. Eventually, the temple will be built, and the city will be raised up. The kingdom will be established, and God's glory will fill the house. This is the ultimate consummation of the enjoyment of Christ.

The danger is ever present that we would be frustrated and distracted away from Christ. Some wind of teaching may take us away from the enjoyment of Christ. That danger was present with the Hebrew believers, and it is also present with us today. We may be distracted from turning to our spirit to enjoy Christ as our rest. It is in our spirit that we have the full enjoyment of Christ. Many things today can be a distraction from the full enjoyment of Christ. Only when we have the full enjoyment of Christ is there the possibility of having the kingdom. The full enjoyment of Christ will consummate in the kingdom.

An Example for Us

In 1 Corinthians 9 the apostle Paul compares the Christian life to a race. At the end of this race a prize awaits the winner. Chapter 10 follows immediately concerning the history of the children of Israel. Of course, in the original text there was no chapter division, so this was one continuous account. According to Paul's concept, the whole nation of Israel was in the wilderness running the race. They all passed through the Red Sea; they all ate the same food; they all drank the same spiritual drink. But not all of them entered into the good land; many of them died in the wilderness. First Corinthians 10:11 says that "these

things happened to them as an example." Actually, the phrase *as an example* should be "typically," that is, related to a type. In other words, all the things that happened to the children of Israel were types. Their experience was a type to us. Their crossing of the Red Sea was a type of our baptism. Their eating of manna was a type of our eating of Christ. Their drinking of the water out of the rock was a type of our drinking of the Spirit.

Moreover, all were wandering in the wilderness, and only four entered into the good land. Two living ones of that generation, Joshua and Caleb, and two dead ones, Jacob and Joseph, entered the good land. This is also a type to us. This means that when the Lord Jesus comes back, some living saints and some dead saints, both of whom are overcomers, will enter into the manifestation of the kingdom. Many Christians have passed through the Red Sea and are wandering in the wilderness, but according to the type, not many will cross over the Jordan River and enter into the rest. We must take this as a serious and sober warning. This strongly admonishes us not to stay in our mind but to turn to our spirit where we can enjoy Christ as our rest. In our spirit we can have the full enjoyment of the riches of Christ, which will consummate in the kingdom.

SUPERIOR TO AARON AND ALL THE PRIESTS

The third section of the book of Hebrews begins with the last verses of chapter 4 and goes through the end of chapter 7. In this section Christ is compared with Aaron, the high priest. Christ is revealed as being much superior to Aaron. Christ became a High Priest not according to the order of Aaron but according to the order of Melchizedek. The order of Melchizedek is an eternal order. He ministered not according to any regulation or commandment of the law but according to the power of an indestructible life (7:16). Because He has this kind of priesthood, He is able to save us to the uttermost. If we are not saved to the uttermost, it does not mean that He is not able to save. Rather, it means that we were not willing to be saved. We will have no excuse. If we are willing to be saved, surely He will save us to the uttermost (v. 25).

Not Laying Again the Foundation

Let us also read Hebrews 6:1-2: "Therefore leaving the word of the beginning of Christ, let us be brought on to maturity, not laying again a

foundation of repentance from dead works and of faith in God, of the teaching of baptisms and of the laying on of hands, of the resurrection of the dead and of eternal judgment." Here the apostle Paul says that we need to leave the word of the beginning of Christ and be brought on to maturity. Many Christians today are fully occupied with the beginning, elementary principles. All they talk about is redemption, justification by faith, forgiveness of sins, and going to heaven. Year after year they speak of the same things. When you are with them, you can hardly hear anything else. In principle, this is like a grandfather who is still studying in elementary school. Not only is he still in elementary school, but his son, his son's son, and even his great grandson are all still studying in the same elementary school. There is no going on. But let us go on! Let us go on from the elementary teachings of Christ to maturity.

Verses 4 through 6 read, "It is impossible for those who have once been enlightened and have tasted of the heavenly gift and have become partakers of the Holy Spirit and have tasted the good word of God and the powers of the age to come, and yet have fallen away, to renew themselves again unto repentance, crucifying again for themselves the Son of God and putting Him to open shame." In these verses Paul covers a number of points. He says that some of the saints have been enlightened, have partaken of the Holy Spirit, and have tasted of the heavenly gift. They have also tasted the good word of God and have tasted the powers of the age to come. What is the heavenly gift? Surely it is something given from heaven. Perhaps it is forgiveness or joy of salvation. We know that when we were saved we did have some real enjoyment. We experienced joy, peace, comfort, forgiveness, and other things. Do you think that a person could be enlightened, taste the heavenly gift, partake of the Holy Spirit, taste the good word of God and the powers of the coming age and yet not be saved? It is impossible! However, most of the Christian teachers consider that such a person has not yet been saved. Verse 6 mentions that some have fallen away. But to fall away is one thing, and to be lost is another. Many saved persons have fallen. Even after we were born physically, we fell many times. But our falling did not constitute us false persons.

Some use verses 4 through 6 to say that once a person has fallen away it is impossible for him to be saved. Verse 1, however, says, "Let us be brought on." Leaving the foundation we must be brought on. The first aspect of the foundation is repentance. We may say that it is the first stone of the foundation. The foundation was already laid with six pieces of stone,

including the first stone of repentance. Paul's concept is that since the Hebrew believers had already laid the foundation, they simply needed to go on. There was no need for them to lay the foundation again. Even if they wanted to do so, it was impossible to lay the foundation again. We may illustrate this with a couple who are married: Suppose after a time they are divorced and then later come back together. While they might say they were remarried, actually it is impossible for them to remarry because they are already married. The marriage was already laid as a foundation. Likewise, the Hebrew Christians had laid the foundation already; they simply needed to go on. They should not have lingered at the foundation.

Many Christians in revival meetings go back and lay the foundation again and again. After a year, another revival meeting comes, and they repent again. Once more they lay the foundation. They go on a little distance, but then they fall. After they fall, another revival comes, and they go back and repent again. They are continually going back to lay the same foundation. This means that they are not going on. These verses do not mean that it is impossible for us to be recovered once we have fallen. They mean that after we have fallen, we have to rise up by the grace of God and go on. We should not go back. We should not lay the foundation of repentance again. The foundation has already been laid. To try to lay it again is to waste our time.

Suppose in the construction of a building, the foundation is laid, and then the work is discontinued. After a year, the work is renewed, and instead of building upon that foundation, another foundation is laid beside the first. Again the work is discontinued, and later a third foundation is laid beside the second. How ridiculous! Eventually, there will be many foundations laid beside one another, but no building up. This is the proper meaning of these verses.

The Pentecostal teachers say that these are real believers but that they lost their salvation and, because of their falling away, they cannot be saved again. This concept is not accurate. What Paul means is this: The Hebrew Christians had laid the foundation but had been distracted. They stopped the building. Now they needed to realize that they should go on. For their going on, there was no need for them to lay the foundation again. They simply needed to go on. We too need to leave the beginning things and go on to enjoy Christ in a further way. If we do not go on, we will surely suffer some punishment.

Going On to Enjoy Christ More

Now let us read Hebrews 6:7-8: “The earth, which drinks the rain which often comes upon it and produces vegetation suitable to those for whose sake also it is cultivated, partakes of blessing from God. But if it brings forth thorns and thistles, it is disapproved and near a curse, whose end is to be burned.” If we do not leave the foundation and go on to experience more of Christ, we are like a piece of ground that drinks the rain but does not bring forth the proper fruit. This will cause us to suffer a loss, but it does not mean that we ourselves will be lost. It is to suffer something for not going on. Let us go on! We should not linger here. We should not go back to lay the foundation again. The foundation has been laid, so let us build upon it. This means that we should go on to enjoy Christ further and further. We may fall many times, but we must rise up and applying the blood, go on with the Lord. The enemy, Satan, will always try to keep us lingering at the foundation. You have to tell that subtle one that you have the blood of the Lord Jesus and that you have the foundation already laid.

We must go on to enjoy Christ as our great High Priest ministering in the heavenly sanctuary, not according to the commandments of the law but according to the power of an indestructible life. He is our High Priest, not according to the order of Aaron but according to the order of Melchizedek, able to save us to the uttermost. We simply must enjoy Him more and more, not caring for the past and not caring for anything behind us. We must press on! Satan always reminds us of our past and what we did yesterday. We have to tell him we only care for today and the expectation of tomorrow. We do not care for yesterday. We all have to forget the things that are behind us and press forward to the things that are ahead of us. Let us go on to enjoy Christ more.

SUPERIOR TO THE OLD COVENANT

We have covered three sections of the book of Hebrews. Christ is superior to the angels in the first section, He is superior to Moses and Joshua in the second section, and He is superior to Aaron and all the priests in the third section. The fourth section, chapter 8 through chapter 10, shows that Christ with His blood is much superior to the old covenant. The New Testament gives us not the law in letters outside us but the law of life within us.

Therefore, we do not need anyone to teach us (8:8-11). We have the living law within us, which is much better than the outward law of letters.

In addition, His precious blood purges and cleanses our conscience so that we may serve the living God (9:14). The new covenant is a better covenant, much superior to the old one. At the time Hebrews was written, there was the danger that the Hebrew Christians might be convinced to go back to Judaism. Perhaps their friends and families were endeavoring to draw them back to Judaism. They may have pointed out to the New Testament believers that the old covenant was given by God and was so wonderful. Because the Hebrew Christians were staggering between the old covenant and the new covenant, the apostle Paul warned them concerning the old covenant. He told them that the old covenant had been fulfilled—that it was over. There is no more sacrifice for sins, because when Christ died for sins, He finished the sacrifice for sins. Christ fulfilled the type of the sin offering. Thus, there is no more sacrifice for sins (10:26). To go back once more and offer the Old Testament sacrifices for sins would be a real insult to the Lord.

Furthermore, Paul told them they should not stop meeting with the believers (v. 25). They should not neglect their assembling together with the other Christians. To stop meeting with the believers meant to go back to Judaism, which was a sinful thing in the eyes of God. To go back to Judaism was to sin willfully. What a serious matter this was!

Not Sinning Willfully

Hebrews 10:26 says, “When we sin willfully after receiving the knowledge of the truth, there no longer remains a sacrifice of bulls and goats for sins.” Some Christian teachers have taught inaccurately that this verse means if we sin willfully, we cannot be forgiven. This is not the proper understanding. The proper understanding is that all the sacrifices in the Old Testament were fulfilled when the Lord Jesus died on the cross. To go back to those animal sacrifices is a sinful thing to the Lord. To go back to Judaism after the sacrifice of the Lord Jesus on the cross is to sin willfully. As far as God is concerned, there is no more sin offering, because His Son offered Himself once for all.

Paul also indicated that if the Hebrew Christians went back to offer the animal sacrifices, God would judge them (v. 27). Their going back would

make the blood of Christ a common thing. But His blood is not common, like the blood of an ox or a lamb. Actually, the blood of the animal sacrifices could not redeem, but the blood of Christ can redeem. To go back to Judaism and offer the blood of an ox or a sheep for the sacrifice of sin is to make the blood of Christ common. This will bring in God's judgment.

Not Insulting the Spirit of Grace

In addition to this, to go back to Judaism and the animal sacrifices would constitute a kind of disobedience to the indwelling Spirit. In verse 29 Paul speaks of insulting the Spirit of grace. To go back to Judaism is to insult the Spirit of grace. This portion of the Word shows that once we have enjoyed and participated in the New Testament way, we must enjoy it to the uttermost. We should not go back to the old way, to the old covenant. To go back to the old way is a sinful thing to the Lord and will bring His judgment upon us. To go back would make the Lord's blood something common and would constitute a kind of disobedience to the indwelling Spirit.

THE WAY OF FAITH

Now we come to the fifth section of the book, which begins with chapter 11. In this section Paul shows us the way of faith. As we go on with the Lord, we must take faith as our way. On our way we have many surrounding, encompassing witnesses. The way of faith is very prevailing. Here we have the Lord Jesus as the Author and Perfecter of our faith. We all must look to Him. We should not be concerned for the surrounding situations. We simply look to the Lord Jesus as our way to go on. If we will not look away to the Lord Jesus as our way, we will lose something and suffer something. Since we have received a kingdom that cannot be shaken, we must take grace to go on in a positive way. We should not be disturbed with difficult situations and circumstances. Go on by faith. The Lord Jesus is the Author and the Perfecter of our faith. We simply look unto Him. By this we will be strengthened to go on.

RUN THE RACE

Chapter 12 shows us that we should put away every encumbrance and run the race. If you fall while running the race, you should simply rise to your feet and continue running the race. There is no need to go back to the beginning

but just to begin where you fell. No runner who falls down while in a race would be so stupid as to go back to the beginning and start over. Rather, he would get up from the point where he falls and continue to run the race.

Many Christians, though, do this very thing. Every year at the time of revival, they go back to the beginning and repent once more. There is no need for them to do this. They just need to rise up from where they have fallen and run the race for the kingdom.

If we will not be obedient to the Lord and go on, we have to realize that our God is a consuming fire (v. 29). If we refuse to take grace and go on, surely God will one day exercise some judgment upon us. This does not mean we will be lost, but it does mean we will suffer something.

We need to see that we have such a wonderful Christ who is superior to everything. He is superior to the angels, to Moses and Joshua, to Aaron and the priests, and to the old covenant. Furthermore, we have such a prevailing way to go on—the way of faith. We need to go on to enjoy Christ and to take the overcoming way. Eventually, we will have the full enjoyment of Christ, which will consummate in the kingdom. However, if we do not go on to enjoy Christ in such a wonderful way, we will miss something, and we will suffer something. All these points in Hebrews are the development of the seeds sown in the book of Matthew concerning the kingdom.

CHAPTER FORTY-SIX

THE HARVEST OF THE KINGDOM IN REVELATION

Scripture Reading: Rev. 1:9a; 2:7, 10-11, 17, 25-29; 3:4-6, 10-13, 20-22; 12:10-11

The harvest of the kingdom is in the book of Revelation. In principle, whatever is revealed in the first pages of a book is the main point of that book. For example, Genesis begins, "In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth." Surely Genesis is a book that reveals God's creation. What is revealed in the first few verses of the book of Revelation? In 1:9 John tells us that he is our brother and fellow partaker in the tribulation and kingdom and endurance in Jesus. He is our companion in the kingdom! The Lord's intention in this book is to open up the matter of the kingdom to all the saints. Yet in the first few chapters of Revelation, the lampstands, the churches, are revealed, not the kingdom. This means that, practically speaking, the churches are the kingdom. The proper church life is the reality of the kingdom. The churches are not just for the churches but for the kingdom. In Revelation John does not say that he is one of the members of the Body of Christ but that he is our companion in the tribulation and kingdom and endurance in Jesus. Tribulation is needed for the kingdom, and endurance is needed for the tribulation. If we would enter into the kingdom, we must suffer. To bear the suffering, we need a certain amount of endurance. And this is not our endurance but the endurance of Jesus. Thus, the book of Revelation opens with the kingdom.

In Revelation 12 there is the birth of the man-child. The man-child signifies the overcomers who have the authority to rule over the nations. This man-child will be raptured to the throne of God in the heavens. When the man-child is raptured to the throne, there will be a great battle in the heavens against Satan, and Satan will be cast down to the earth. Today the enemy, Satan, is still in the heavens, but once the overcomers arrive there, he will have no place. He will be cast down. Once he is cast down, a loud voice will declare, "Now has come the salvation and the power and the kingdom of our God and the authority of His Christ, for the accuser of our brothers has been cast down, who accuses them before our God day and night" (v. 10). Thus, Revelation begins with the kingdom in chapter 1 and also declares the coming

of the kingdom in chapter 12. This indicates that Revelation is a book on the kingdom. Matthew contains the seed of the kingdom, the Epistles contain the growth of the seed, and Revelation contains the harvest of the seed of the kingdom.

What is the harvest of the kingdom? The first aspect of the harvest of the kingdom is the seven lampstands, and the ultimate harvest of the kingdom will be the holy city, New Jerusalem. The New Jerusalem is simply the harvest of the kingdom to the uttermost. In the New Jerusalem the kingdom will be fully manifested. Even the millennium will not be the ultimate manifestation of the kingdom. But the New Jerusalem will be the ultimate consummation and fullest manifestation of the kingdom.

The first few chapters of Revelation show us our participation in the kingdom. God's intention for the church is to have the kingdom, and for this all His believers must be matured to the extent that they can live in the reality of the kingdom and bring in the manifestation of the kingdom. We have seen previously that the manifestation of the kingdom will simply be the maturity and the ultimate growth of the kingdom life. When we live in the reality of the kingdom in its ultimate state, that will be the manifestation of the kingdom. God's purpose is to have the church, which can bring in His kingdom. Many Christians have never seen God's purpose and God's goal. They think that God's purpose in the redemption of Christ is to enable people to go to heaven. We all must come back to the pure word of the Bible to see that the redemption of Christ is to bring in the kingdom. The church in a normal way is simply the reality of the kingdom, and this reality will consummate in the manifestation of the kingdom.

Unfortunately, many real Christians have not seen this view and are short of this experience. Most have fallen below the standard of the normal life. Therefore, in the last book of the New Testament, Revelation, the Lord Jesus sounded forth a call not to the unbelievers but to the believers. Every believer has been called once by the Lord. But in Revelation 2 and 3 the Lord Jesus sent forth a second calling to the believers, a calling to be overcomers. We all have been called to believe, and we all have been called into the church life. But many are still short of the Lord's purpose and not up to the normal level that is adequate to bring in the manifestation of the kingdom. Because so many are below the normal level, there is no possibility for them to grow in life. Although the life of the Lord Jesus is within the believers, it has no

possibility to grow, because they are below the normal level. Because of this, the Lord Jesus issued a call to the overcomers.

EPHESUS

Leaving Their First Love

In chapters 2 and 3 of Revelation, in those epistles to the seven churches, the Lord Jesus issued a call to the overcomers. In His calling to the overcomers, the Lord Jesus revealed the proper condition of the church, which is for the kingdom. In 2:4 the Lord said to the church in Ephesus, "I have one thing against you, that you have left your first love." If we would be the proper church to bring in the kingdom, the Lord Jesus must be our first and best love. This is the first requirement. We must take care of our love for the Lord. Many Christians today have lost their first love toward the Lord. They are still good at working for the Lord and doing many things for the Lord, but they do not love the Lord as they did at the beginning. This means they have lost their first love, their original love, their best love, for the Lord. They have works but no love. Therefore, the Lord's first call to the overcomers is to come back and love Him supremely, to love Him the best. The Lord promised, "To him who overcomes, to him I will give to eat of the tree of life, which is in the Paradise of God" (v. 7). If we will come back to our first and best love for the Lord, we will be given to eat of the tree of life.

The Paradise of God

The tree of life is also in the New Jerusalem, which shows us that the New Jerusalem is the real paradise of God. The garden of Eden in Genesis 1 and 2 may be considered as the first paradise of God. In Luke 23 the Lord Jesus told the crucified thief that he would be with the Lord in Paradise. That Paradise is neither the garden of Eden nor the New Jerusalem but the joyful, comforting part of Hades, where the spirits of all the dead saints are being kept. This is the second Paradise of the Bible. Eventually, the people of God will be concentrated in the holy city, Jerusalem, and that will be the eternal Paradise with the tree of life in its center. The Lord's promise in Revelation 2 is that if we will overcome the present situation and recover our first and best love toward Him, we will be given the right to enter the New Jerusalem as the Paradise of God and eat the tree of life as a reward.

A Reward to the Overcomers

We must realize that the New Jerusalem with the tree of life in it will be a reward during the millennium. Not all the saved ones will get into the millennium. Only the overcoming ones will enjoy the tree of life during the millennium. During the thousand years of the millennium, the New Jerusalem as the Paradise of God will be a kind of reward. But after the millennium, in the new heaven and the new earth, the New Jerusalem will be a blessing to all the saved ones. In the millennium it will be a reward to the overcomers, but eventually it will be a common blessing to all God's people. During the millennium, the New Jerusalem will be the bride. But in the new heaven and the new earth, the New Jerusalem will be the wife. The bride is only for one day. On the first day of marriage, a young lady is the bride, but after that she is the wife. By the second day some of the freshness is gone. Although there is the joy, the joy is not so fresh. If we will not be the overcomers, we will not enjoy the freshness of the New Jerusalem in the millennium. We will miss that part. After the millennium we will enjoy the New Jerusalem but not as a bride. We will enjoy the New Jerusalem only as a wife, in a common way. The Lord's promise is that if we will be overcomers now, we will be given to eat of the tree of life in the New Jerusalem. This surely is during the time of the millennium. Each of the seven epistles in these two chapters of Revelation reveals to us something either as a reward or a kind of loss or punishment during the period of the millennium.

SMYRNA

Smyrna is the church that suffered persecution. If we all return to our first love for the Lord, surely the persecution will come. During the first, second, and third centuries, the church suffered much persecution. Satan used the Roman Empire to persecute the church and to kill many believers. *Foxe's Book of Martyrs* tells how many of these early Christians were persecuted and martyred for the sake of the Lord Jesus. The Lord Jesus promised those persecuted ones that if they would overcome, they would receive the crown of life and not suffer the second death. To be hurt of the second death does not mean to be lost, but it means to suffer something. Any kind of suffering will not be pleasant. Do not be concerned about the details concerning the second death. Simply take the warning from the Lord. The Lord Jesus does not give us the details because He does not expect us to be there. He expects that we all would receive the crown of life. Of course, the crown of life is not given

today but is given during the time of the millennium. Regardless of how much you may suffer for the Lord Jesus today, you will not receive a crown in this age. Even the apostle Paul does not yet have his crown. He is still waiting for the time of the millennium to receive his crown. At that time all the overcomers will be the co-kings with Christ and receive a crown.

PERGAMOS

Satan's persecution of the church was not successful. The more he persecuted the church, the stronger the Christians became. So he used a more subtle attack. At the beginning of the fourth century, during the time of Constantine, Satan changed his tactics. He turned from persecuting to welcoming the church. This is signified by the church in Pergamos. *Pergamos* literally means "marriage" and symbolically means "a fortified tower." This signifies the church having a kind of evil marriage with the world and becoming something great. Constantine brought the world into the church and took the church back into the world. This became an evil and illegal marriage. The church was married to the world. Because the church was married to the world, it became something great as a fortified tower.

This was the beginning of the great tree mentioned in Matthew 13. Within Pergamos there were the teachings of Balaam and the Nicolaitans (Rev. 2:14-15). These teachings were a kind of evil leaven within the church. The Lord Jesus came in to call out the overcomers and to promise them two things: the hidden manna and a white stone. The stone is for building, and the white color indicates that it is approved and pleasant to the Lord. Upon the white stone there is a new name, which none besides yourself can know. Many times we should have some special experiences with the Lord that others cannot understand. Sometimes even our family cannot understand our experiences of the Lord. We experience something new and fresh that others cannot understand. The new name indicates fresh and new experiences of the Lord.

If we enjoy the Lord in a hidden way, He will become the hidden manna to us, and we will become a justified, approved stone that is so pleasant to the Lord for His building. We will enjoy the experiences that others cannot understand. This is the overcoming life for the kingdom. It may be that many dear ones in the local churches have become a white stone with a new name and are enjoying the real and rich experiences of the Lord. If so, they will

enjoy the right and privilege to experience the Lord Jesus not as the open manna in the wilderness but as the hidden manna in the Holy of Holies. Within the Holy of Holies there was the Ark, and within the Ark there was the golden pot with the manna. The manna here is something very hidden and very close to God's presence. Because the overcomers are one with the Lord and so near to Him, they enjoy Him as the hidden manna. This enjoyment is for the kingdom.

THYATIRA

Following Pergamos, which indicates an illegal marriage of the church to the world, comes Thyatira. Thyatira signifies the Roman Catholic Church, which is full of all kinds of corrupting leaven. The idols, the fornication, the evil teachings, and the practices of Jezebel are the leaven within the Roman Catholic Church. This is the evil woman in Matthew 13 who hid the leaven in three measures of meal. The Lord also issued a call to the overcomers within Thyatira. He called them to overcome the fornication, the evil teachings, and all the evil practices. The lighting of the candles, the burning of the incense, and the worshipping of all the idols in the Roman Catholic Church are a real blasphemy to the Lord. Some might say that they received help from the Roman Catholic Church and that there have been many dear believers within the Roman Catholic Church. No doubt the Roman Catholic Church is gilded and covered with many precious persons and precious things. However, this is for cheating people. This is a false front. The outside of the cup is covered with gold, pearls, and precious stones, but the inside of the cup is full of abominations (Rev. 17:4). We all must overcome the abominations—the idols, the spiritual fornication, and all kinds of leaven. We must hold to what the Lord has shown us. Eventually, the overcomers will rule over the nations during the millennium.

Not All Believers Being Overcomers

We must see that being a believer is not equal to being an overcomer. Some Christian teachers have taught that all the real believers in the Lord Jesus will reign as kings. Concerning this point, I prefer not to answer doctrinally but experientially. I would like to ask them concerning their own situation. Do they have the appearance of kings? Is their daily life the living of kings? Have they been disciplined and trained, or are they loose and sloppy? Are they

ready to be kings to reign with the Lord? I am afraid that when the Lord Jesus comes, they will say, “O Lord Jesus! I am not ready!”

If we would reign with the Lord Jesus as kings, we need to be trained and strictly disciplined by Him. The young man who will be the next king of England is daily and constantly under strict training and discipline. This training is so that he will be qualified to be the king. He is learning to look like a king, to talk like a king, and to behave like a king. How about yourself? Today you gossip, murmur, and are so loose. Are you ready to rule as a king? Are you qualified to be a king? By this we can see that just to be a believer is not sufficient to be an overcomer and to rule and reign with Christ. We must be trained and disciplined by the Lord. Otherwise, how can we rule over five cities or ten cities? (Luke 19:17, 19).

SARDIS

The church in Sardis represents the church of the Reformation. In a sense the Protestants of the reformed church are much better than the Catholics. However, the Lord says that, although they were reformed and revived, they were still very weak. In Revelation 3:1 the Lord said that Sardis had a name that they were living, but they were dead. In verse 2 He said they needed to be watchful and establish the things which remained, which were about to die. The striking characteristic of the Protestant churches is that they are short of life. Many things may be right, but there is little life. Nearly everything with fundamental Christianity—the prayer, the Bible reading, the gospel preaching—is weak and about to die. Actually, they have little impact. However, the Lord said, “You have a few names in Sardis who have not defiled their garments, and they will walk with Me in white because they are worthy” (v. 4). The defiled garments indicate the presence of death or the absence of life. To be an overcomer in that kind of situation is to keep oneself from death.

This means that we have to be alive and strong, and we must have an impact. Even when we stand up to share a testimony, we should not speak in a dead way. Rather, we need to speak with our spirit strengthened and released. We need to overcome the dead situation in Protestantism. We need to overcome all kinds of death. We need to wear a white garment, with no stain of death. If this is our case, our name will not be erased from the book of life (v. 5). For a person’s name to be erased from the book of life does not

mean that he will be lost. It relates to the matter of reward or punishment. In order to understand the Bible we must always keep the basic principles. The principle concerning salvation is that it is eternal. Once we are saved, we are saved eternally. We can never be lost. Therefore, to have our name erased out of the book of life does not relate to the losing of salvation but to the losing of a reward from the Lord. If we would not overcome all kinds of dead situations and be living, we will suffer a loss.

PHILADELPHIA

The Lord Jesus did not rebuke Philadelphia for anything. Rather, He told them that because they had kept His word and had not denied His name, He would keep them out of the hour of trial which was about to come on the earth. This means that before the tribulation comes, He will take them away. Furthermore, He will make them a pillar in God's temple. In chapter 2 there is the white stone, and in chapter 3 there is the pillar built into the temple. All the overcomers are for the building of God's temple, and this is for the kingdom.

LAODICEA

The church in Laodicea is the fallen and degraded church in Philadelphia. They are very proud, thinking that they have everything, that they know everything, and that they have seen everything. But in the eyes of the Lord they are poor and naked. Therefore, the Lord advised them to buy gold and eyesalve so that they could see (3:18). They need to repent of their pride and open themselves to the Lord so that He can come in. Eventually, the overcomers among them will feast with the Lord and will sit with the Lord on His throne during the millennium.

GROWING FOR THE KINGDOM

From these seven epistles, we can see that whether we receive a reward or suffer a loss is related to the kingdom. These things are revealed so that we can fight and grow and go on for the manifestation of the kingdom. We are growing today for the manifestation of the kingdom. We are fighting today for the manifestation of the kingdom. Even the Lord Jesus' coming back is related to the manifestation of the kingdom. We may talk much about the Lord's coming and the prophecies related to it, but if we do not grow, He

cannot come back. We need to fight the battle to gain the maturity. By the growing and the fighting, a man-child will be delivered according to Revelation 12, and there will be the declaration that the kingdom of the Lord has come because the accuser has been cast down by the overcoming ones. Today the Lord Jesus is calling to the overcomers, and He is waiting for our cooperation. We all have to say, “Lord Jesus, I answer Your calling. Lord Jesus, I will love You, I will be faithful to death, and I will never get into any part of the great tree. I will overcome all the leaven in Catholicism and all the deadness of today’s Protestantism. I will keep Your living word and confess Your precious name. I will keep myself from spiritual pride. Lord, keep me feasting with You and You with me.” If we will grow, we will overcome and will bring in the manifestation of the kingdom. The manifestation of the kingdom will not come in an accidental way but in a gradual way by our growth. Hallelujah! Today we are on the way to the harvest of the manifestation of the kingdom in Revelation!

CHAPTER FORTY-SEVEN

DIFFERENT ASPECTS OF THE KINGDOM

Scripture Reading: Matt. 3:2; 12:28; 11:11-12; 19:23-24; 21:43; 13:41, 43; 16:28; Mark 9:1; Eph. 5:5; 2 Sam. 7:13; Luke 1:32-33; Acts 15:16; 1:6; Matt. 25:34; Luke 19:12, 15a; Dan. 7:13-14; 2:44; Rev. 11:15; 1 Cor. 15:24-26

In the New Testament there are three major books on the kingdom: Matthew, Hebrews, and Revelation. The book of Hebrews starts and ends with the kingdom. Hebrews 1:8 says, "Of the Son, 'Your throne, O God, is forever and ever, and the scepter of uprightness is the scepter of Your kingdom.'" Then 12:28 says, "Therefore receiving an unshakable kingdom." Revelation also begins with the kingdom: "I John, your brother and fellow partaker in the tribulation and kingdom and endurance in Jesus" (1:9). Revelation continues with the church in the reality of the kingdom and ends with the kingdom in its manifestation.

The kingdom revealed in the last chapters of Revelation is the consummation of the enjoyment of Christ. It is in this book that we are told we need to eat Christ as our life supply. He is the tree of life and the living water. In chapter 2 He is the hidden manna, and in chapter 3 He is the feast. At the end of the book of Revelation, a call is issued: "The Spirit and the bride say, Come! And let him who hears say, Come! And let him who is thirsty come; let him who wills, take the water of life freely" (22:17). How can we realize and experience the kingdom? It is not by learning the doctrines about the kingdom but by eating and drinking Christ. Eventually, the eating and drinking of Christ will consummate in the kingdom. This is because the kingdom is simply the enlargement of Christ. Christ will not be enlarged by "mushrooming" overnight. The enlargement of Christ is by our daily eating. We eat of Him day by day and bit by bit. The more we eat and drink of Him, the more He spreads within us. The more He spreads within us, the more the kingdom is manifested. Many Christians consider that the kingdom is only a kind of dispensation or sphere. But we must see the life aspect of the kingdom. Remember the stone in Daniel 2, which is not cut with human hands but eventually becomes a great mountain. Christ as a piece of stone will become a great mountain. And Christ as a seed of the kingdom will become the harvest

of the kingdom. The way for us to realize Christ as the kingdom is to eat and drink of Him as the tree of life and the water of life. These two items, the tree of life and the water of life, will be our portion for eternity.

What is the church life? The church life is just a life of eating and drinking of Christ all the day long. It is not a life of doctrines, regulations, and forms. The church life is a life of eating of Christ daily. Have you eaten of Christ today? The book of Revelation shows the kingdom in its ultimate consummation of the enjoyment of eating Christ.

In all the previous chapters we have mainly seen the life side of the kingdom. Now we must see the doctrinal side. In order to be balanced, we need not only life but also doctrine. The verses in the Scripture Reading indicate ten different kinds of kingdoms. First is the kingdom of the heavens. Matthew 3:2 says, "Repent, for the kingdom of the heavens has drawn near."

In Matthew 12:28 the Lord Jesus said, "If I, by the Spirit of God, cast out the demons, then the kingdom of God has come upon you." This is not the kingdom of the heavens but the kingdom of God. Matthew 19:23-24 mentions both of these kinds of kingdoms: "Jesus said to His disciples, Truly I say to you, Only with difficulty will a rich man enter into the kingdom of the heavens. And again I say to you, It is easier for a camel to pass through the eye of a needle than for a rich man to enter into the kingdom of God." Matthew 21:43 also mentions the kingdom of God: "Therefore I say to you that the kingdom of God shall be taken from you and shall be given to a nation producing its fruit." By reading these verses, we can see that the kingdom of God was there already, but that the kingdom of the heavens had not yet come.

Matthew 13:41 speaks of the kingdom of the Son of Man: "The Son of Man will send His angels, and they will collect out of His kingdom all the stumbling blocks and those who practice lawlessness." The kingdom of the Son of Man is the third kind of kingdom mentioned in the Scriptures.

In Matthew 13:43 there is the Father's kingdom: "Then the righteous will shine forth like the sun in the kingdom of their Father. He who has ears to hear, let him hear."

Ephesians 5:5 mentions the kingdom of Christ and of God: "This you realize, knowing that every fornicator or unclean person or greedy person (who is an

idolater) has no inheritance in the kingdom of Christ and of God." The kingdom of Christ and of God is the fifth kingdom.

Second Samuel 7:13 is a promise or a prophecy concerning Christ: "It is he who will build a house for My name, and I will establish the throne of his kingdom forever." Christ will be the Son of David to build up the house of God, and God will set up His throne with His kingdom forever. This is the kingdom of the Son of David or the kingdom of David. The kingdom of the Son of David is also mentioned in Luke 1:32-33: "He will be great and will be called Son of the Most High; and the Lord God will give to Him the throne of David His father, and He will reign over the house of Jacob forever, and of His kingdom there will be no end." Before the Lord Jesus was born, the angel told His mother that her son would be the successor to the throne of David. This is the kingdom of David or the kingdom of the Son of David. Acts 15:16 says, "After these things I will return, and I will rebuild the tabernacle of David which has fallen; and I will rebuild its ruins and erect it again." This verse indicates that the tabernacle of David was ruined but that the Lord will come back to restore and rebuild it. This is the kingdom of David. The kingdom of the Son of David or the tabernacle of David is the sixth kingdom mentioned in the Scriptures.

The seventh kingdom is mentioned in Acts 1:6: "The ones who came together asked Him, saying, Lord, are You at this time restoring the kingdom to Israel?" Here we have the kingdom of Israel. Matthew 25:34 says, "Then the King will say to those on His right hand, Come, you who are blessed of My Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world." Here is a kingdom prepared not *before* the foundation of the world but *from* the foundation of the world. This is the eighth kind of kingdom. The ninth kingdom is the millennial kingdom (Rev. 11:15; 20:4-6). Finally, there is the kingdom of Messiah, the messianic kingdom (Dan. 7:14).

THE BEGINNING AND ENDING OF THE KINGDOM OF THE HEAVENS AND ITS PROCESS

The kingdom of the heavens is divided into two periods: the period of its appearance and reality and the period of its manifestation. The appearance and reality of the kingdom begins, progresses, and ends with the church. The manifestation of the kingdom of the heavens begins, progresses, and ends

with the millennium. Matthew 3:2; 4:17; and 10:7 show us several things: First, they show us that the kingdom of the heavens had a beginning. It came at a definite time, and before its coming, it was near. Second, before John the Baptist came, the kingdom of the heavens had not yet come. Third, when John the Baptist came out to preach, the kingdom of the heavens had not yet come but was near. Fourth, even when the Lord Jesus began to preach, the kingdom of the heavens had not yet come but was still near. Fifth, even when the Lord Jesus sent out the twelve and the seventy disciples to preach, the kingdom of the heavens had not yet arrived but was near. Matthew 11:11 says, "Truly I say to you, Among those born of women there has not arisen one greater than John the Baptist, yet he who is least in the kingdom of the heavens is greater than he." This verse proves that in the Old Testament time the kingdom of the heavens had not yet come. The kingdom of the heavens had not come even at the time of John the Baptist, because the prophets in the Old Testament and John the Baptist were not people in the kingdom of the heavens. According to Matthew 11:12, from the time John the Baptist came out to preach until the time he was put into prison, the kingdom of the heavens had not yet come formally. The period from John the Baptist to the formal arrival of the kingdom of the heavens was a period of transition. During that transitional period, although the kingdom of the heavens had not yet formally arrived, men could enter into the kingdom if they so desired. We may illustrate this by a new shop that does business before its formal, grand opening. After it does business for a while, it has a grand opening. The grand opening of the kingdom of the heavens was on the day of Pentecost, but people like Peter and John entered into the kingdom of the heavens before that time.

In almost every instance, the Gospel of Matthew uses the term *the kingdom of the heavens*. However, in Matthew 12 the Lord used the term *the kingdom of God*. The Lord Jesus was very careful in His speaking. *The kingdom of God* is used in that chapter instead of *the kingdom of the heavens* because at that time the kingdom of the heavens had not yet formally come. When the Lord Jesus cast out demons, He manifested the authority of God before the Jews, but that was simply the kingdom of God coming to them, not the kingdom of the heavens. This indicates that before the kingdom of the heavens came, the kingdom of God already existed.

Now let us read Matthew 21:43: "Therefore I say to you that the kingdom of God shall be taken from you and shall be given to a nation producing its fruit."

This verse proves that the kingdom of God, not the kingdom of the heavens, was in the midst of the Jewish people at that time. The parable in Matthew 22:2-4 shows us that the kingdom of the heavens began at the time of the preaching of the gospel after the Lord Jesus had died, resurrected, and accomplished redemption.

In the parable of the sower in Matthew 13, the Lord Jesus did not say, "The kingdom of the heavens has become like..." It was not until the parable of the tares that the Lord said, "The kingdom of the heavens has become like..." This is because the appearance and reality of the kingdom of the heavens began from the event spoken of in the parable of the tares, that is, the happenings at Pentecost.

In Matthew 16:18-19, after the Lord Jesus said that He would build His church, He also said that He would give the keys of the kingdom of the heavens to Peter. This shows that when Peter used the keys of the kingdom, the Lord began to build the church. It was at Pentecost that Peter used the keys of the kingdom of the heavens to open the door for men to believe and enter into the kingdom of the heavens. It was also at that time that the Lord began to build His church. Therefore, the beginning of the church at Pentecost was also the beginning of the kingdom of the heavens.

Once the church began, there were the overcoming believers in the church living in the reality of the kingdom of the heavens as recorded in Matthew 5—7. Hence, the reality of the kingdom of the heavens began at that time. On the other hand, once the church came into existence, Satan mixed the false Christians, the tares, with the real Christians. Thus, the appearance of the kingdom of the heavens also began at that time. Therefore, the reality and the appearance of the kingdom of the heavens began nearly at the same time with the church after Pentecost.

Matthew 18:17-18 shows us that the authority of the kingdom of the heavens which Peter possessed at the beginning of the church is also later possessed by the church. Under normal conditions the church has the authority of the kingdom of the heavens to bind what the heavens have bound and to loose what the heavens have loosed. This proves that the kingdom of the heavens and the church progress together. Wherever there is the church, there are also the overcoming believers in the church living in the reality of the kingdom of the heavens. At the same time there are the false believers

mixed in to produce the appearance of the kingdom of the heavens. Therefore, the reality and the appearance of the kingdom of the heavens started together with the church and progressed together with the church. The reality and appearance of the kingdom of the heavens go along with the church and are dependent upon the church. On the one hand, the reality of the kingdom of the heavens is hidden in the church, and on the other hand, the appearance of the kingdom of the heavens goes along with the periphery of the church. When the Lord Jesus comes back and ends the church age, the reality and appearance of the kingdom of the heavens will also be ended. At that time the Lord Jesus will burn the appearance of the kingdom of the heavens, that is, the so-called Christendom. At the same time the reality of the kingdom of the heavens will become the manifestation of the kingdom of the heavens.

Daniel 7:13-14 shows that at the end of this age the Lord Jesus will receive the kingdom from God and come to the earth to establish His kingdom. Daniel 2:44 shows that at the end of this age, the Lord will crush the nations of the earth into pieces in order to establish His kingdom. Revelation 11:15 reveals that at the end of this age, after the Lord has crushed the nations to pieces, the kingdom of the world will become the kingdom of our Lord.

The manifestation of the kingdom of the heavens will begin at that time. From then on, the Lord and the overcoming believers will reign together in the manifestation of the kingdom of the heavens and rule over the earth for a thousand years (20:4, 6).

First Corinthians 15:24-26 tells us that when the end has come, at the end of the millennium, the Lord will have destroyed all the powers of Satan. The last enemy that He will destroy is death. Then He will deliver up to God the kingdom that He had received from God. When the millennium comes to a close, the manifestation of the kingdom of the heavens will end. From that time on, there will be a new heaven and a new earth, the eternal kingdom of God.

Just as the reality and appearance of the kingdom of the heavens have begun, are progressing, and will end together with the church, so also the manifestation of the kingdom of the heavens begins, progresses, and ends with the millennium. To summarize briefly, the kingdom of the heavens started with the church and ends together with the millennium. Before the church there was not the kingdom of the heavens; and after the millennium,

there will not be the kingdom of the heavens. The kingdom of the heavens is contained in the two dispensations of the church and the millennium, and it embraces these two dispensations. The beginning of these two dispensations is the beginning of the kingdom of the heavens; the process of these two dispensations is the process of the kingdom of the heavens; and the end of these two dispensations is the end of the kingdom of the heavens.

THE DIFFERENCE BETWEEN THE KINGDOM OF THE HEAVENS AND THE KINGDOM OF GOD

Now we need to consider the differences between these kinds of kingdoms. First is the difference between the kingdom of the heavens and the kingdom of God. There is a difference between the two, but they cannot be separated. For example, we can differentiate our hand from our body, but we cannot separate them. The body is the whole, while the hand is part of the whole body. The two can be differentiated but cannot be separated. Likewise, the kingdom of God is the whole, while the kingdom of the heavens is a part of the whole. They can be differentiated but cannot be separated.

The kingdom of God is the reigning of God. Since it is God's reigning, it follows God's existence. God's existence is from eternity to eternity, without beginning or ending; therefore, God's reigning, God's kingdom, is also from eternity to eternity, without beginning or ending. The Bible shows us that the kingdom of God embraces a wide scope: it embraces eternity without beginning before the foundation of the world, Adam in the garden and the chosen patriarchs, the nation of Israel in the Old Testament, today's church, the millennium and the kingdom of the heavens in the future, and the new heaven and the new earth, which are eternal and without ending. All these six items are included in the kingdom of God and are parts of the kingdom of God. (See chart in chapter 35.)

Daniel 7:13-14 shows that the kingdom which the Lord Jesus is bringing with Him at His second coming is the eternal kingdom which God will set up on the earth (2:44), and which is received from the Ancient of Days (Luke 19:12, 15) and belongs to the Ancient of Days, that is, to God. This proves not only that the kingdom which the Lord Jesus will be establishing on earth is

the kingdom of God but also that the kingdom is from ancient times, from eternity.

Matthew 3:2; 4:17; and 10:7 indicate that when John the Baptist, the Lord Jesus, and the disciples went out to preach, the kingdom of the heavens had not yet come but was near. Matthew 21:43 shows that before the kingdom of the heavens came, the kingdom of God was already in the midst of the Israelites. However, because they produced no proper fruit, the kingdom of God was taken away from them and given to a people who would produce fruit, that is, to the church. Hence, the kingdom of God today is the church. This proves that both the nation of Israel in the Old Testament and the church in the New Testament are the kingdom of God, being parts of the kingdom of God.

Now let us read Luke 13:28-29: "There will be weeping and gnashing of teeth there when you see Abraham and Isaac and Jacob and all the prophets in the kingdom of God, but you being cast outside. And they will come from the east and the west, and from the north and the south, and will recline at table in the kingdom of God." These verses prove that the millennium in the future is also a part of the kingdom of God. What is mentioned here concerning those who will recline at table in the kingdom of God is related to the millennium. Although it is in the millennium, the Word says it is in the kingdom of God. This is because the millennium is a part of the kingdom of God.

Ephesians 5:5 and Revelation 11:15 reveal that the kingdom of the heavens in the future is also a part of the kingdom of God. These verses also mention the kingdom of Christ and of God and the kingdom of our Lord and of His Christ. In both cases, *the kingdom* is singular in the original, showing that the kingdom of Christ and of God and the kingdom of our Lord and of His Christ are not two kingdoms but one. This kingdom is the kingdom of the heavens in the future and also the eternal kingdom of Christ mentioned in 2 Peter 1:11. This kingdom of the heavens in the future is the ruling of Christ as King; hence, it is the kingdom of Christ. At the same time, it is God's ruling; hence, it is also the kingdom of God.

First Corinthians 15:24 says that at the end, that is, at the end of the millennium, when Christ will have destroyed all the power of Satan, He will deliver up the kingdom to God. This proves that after the millennium, during

the time of the new heaven and the new earth, the kingdom of God will still exist. Therefore, the new heavens and the new earth in the future are also a part of the kingdom of God.

Therefore, according to the Scriptures, the kingdom of God stretches from eternity to eternity, without beginning and without ending. It is very wide in its scope. The kingdom of the heavens, which has a beginning and an ending, is a part of the kingdom of God, but its scope is narrower. Before the kingdom of the heavens began, there was already the kingdom of God. After the kingdom of the heavens ends, the kingdom of God will continue to exist for eternity. During the time of the kingdom of the heavens, the kingdom of the heavens is the kingdom of God. Therefore, sometimes the kingdom of the heavens is also called the kingdom of God.

Matthew 19:23-24 shows that the kingdom of the heavens is the kingdom of God. Matthew 13:31-33; 11:11; and 8:11 compared with Luke 13:18-21; 7:28; and 13:28-29 prove also that the kingdom of the heavens is the kingdom of God. Since the kingdom of the heavens is a part of the kingdom of God, it can also be called the kingdom of God. Because California is a part of the United States, it can also be called the United States. For example, a foreign visitor who comes to California also comes to the United States. Although California can be called the United States, the United States cannot be called California. Likewise, we may call the kingdom of the heavens the kingdom of God, but we cannot call the kingdom of God the kingdom of the heavens. This is because the kingdom of God embraces the kingdom of the heavens, but the kingdom of the heavens does not embrace the kingdom of God.

The kingdom of God is His entire ruling from eternity to eternity. The kingdom of the heavens is the ruling of the heavens from the birth of the church to the end of the millennium. Whoever is in the kingdom of the heavens is in the kingdom of God. But all those in the kingdom of God may not necessarily be in the kingdom of the heavens. All the saved ones are in the kingdom of God, and all enter into the kingdom of God, but they may not all enter into the kingdom of the heavens. Only the overcoming believers participate in the reality of the kingdom of the heavens and will be able to enter into the manifestation of the kingdom of the heavens. This is the difference between the kingdom of the heavens and the kingdom of God.

THE DIFFERENCE BETWEEN

THE KINGDOM OF THE HEAVENS AND THE MILLENNIUM

The millennium refers to the time after Christ comes again as King to rule the world and before the new heaven and new earth (Rev. 20:4-6). It is divided into two portions: the heavenly and the earthly parts. The earthly portion is the kingdom of Messiah, which the Jewish people are expecting, or the kingdom of the Son of Man, mentioned in Matthew 13:41. It consists of two groups of people. One group is the nations (the sheep in Matthew 25) as the people; the other group is the Jewish people as the priests, leading the people of the nations to serve God, with the earthly Jerusalem as the center (Zech. 8:20-23; 14:16-17; Isa. 2:2-3; Jer. 3:17).

The heavenly portion is the manifestation of the kingdom of the heavens, or the manifested kingdom of the heavens; it is also the kingdom of the Father, mentioned in Matthew 13:43. All the believers who are being disciplined in the reality of the kingdom of the heavens today will enter into the heavenly portion of the millennium in the future to enjoy the glory and gladness of the kingdom and reign with the Lord as kings over the nations for a thousand years.

Therefore, the millennium is the period of Christ reigning over the world as King, while the kingdom of the heavens (referring to the manifestation of the kingdom of the heavens) is the heavenly portion of the millennium in which Christ and the overcoming saints will reign as kings over the world (Rev. 2:26-27; 20:4-6; 2 Tim. 2:12; Luke 19:17, 19).

THE DIFFERENCE BETWEEN THE KINGDOM OF THE HEAVENS AND THE KINGDOM OF MESSIAH

In the Old Testament the Lord promised the Jewish people that the anointed One, that is, the Messiah (in Hebrew *Messiah* means “the anointed One”), will come to inherit the throne of David and restore the Jewish nation, that is, the nation of Israel. We can see this in Genesis 49:10; 2 Samuel 7:13, 16; Psalms 2:8-9; 72:1-20; 89:4; 110:2-3; Isaiah 9:6-7; 11:1-5, 10; Jeremiah 23:5-6; 30:9; 33:14-17; Ezekiel 21:27; 34:23-24; 37:24, 28; Daniel 2:35; 7:14; Hosea 3:5; Amos 9:11-12; and Zechariah 3:8; 6:12-13; 9:9-10.

When the Lord Jesus came the first time, the Jewish people were expecting the Messiah to restore His kingdom (Luke 2:25; 3:15; 7:19; John 1:41; 7:27, 41). However, it will not be until the Lord's second coming that He will restore the Messianic kingdom (Matt. 23:39). The kingdom which the Lord, the Messiah, will restore—the kingdom of Messiah or the kingdom of Israel to be restored in the future (Acts 1:6)—is the earthly portion of the millennium, "the tabernacle of David" which the Lord will rebuild (15:16), and the kingdom which God has prepared from the foundation of the world for the "sheep" that are to be the people on the earth during the millennium (Matt. 25:32-34). The Lord will sit on the "throne of David" and "reign over the house of Jacob" (the Jewish people, Luke 1:32-33), ruling over the nations on the earth during the millennium (Psa. 2:8; 72:8; Dan. 7:14; 2:35).

Therefore, the kingdom of the heavens is definitely different from the kingdom of Messiah. The kingdom of Messiah is the earthly portion of the millennium; the kingdom of the heavens, that is, the manifestation of the kingdom of the heavens, is the heavenly portion in the millennium. The kingdom of Messiah is earthly; the kingdom of the heavens is heavenly. Before the kingdom of Messiah comes, the kingdom of the heavens, that is, the reality of the kingdom of the heavens, is already with the overcoming believers. The kingdom of Messiah is for the Jewish people to be restored in the future and for the Gentiles as "sheep"; the kingdom of the heavens is for the overcomers in the church. The future kingdom of Messiah is the expectation of the Jews; the future kingdom of the heavens, that is, the manifestation of the kingdom of the heavens, should be the expectation of the believers (the overcoming ones). In the kingdom of Messiah, there will be the Jewish people as the priests and the Gentiles as the people; in the future kingdom of the heavens, there are only the kings and not the people. The people to be ruled over by the kings in the future kingdom of the heavens are the ones who will be in the kingdom of Messiah. Therefore, the kingdom of Messiah is the subordinate of the future kingdom of the heavens; the future kingdom of the heavens is the ruling authority of the kingdom of Messiah. The overcomers in the church will reign with Christ for one thousand years in the kingdom of the heavens, ruling over the Jews and Gentiles in the kingdom of Messiah (Rev. 20:4, 6; Matt. 19:28; Rev. 2:26).

THE DIFFERENCE BETWEEN THE HEAVENS AND THE KINGDOM OF THE HEAVENS

The heavens spoken of here refer to the third heaven, where God and the Lord Jesus dwell. The third heaven is a dwelling place where God and the Lord Jesus are today. The kingdom of the heavens is a kingdom, the ruling of the heavens today, wherein the seeking believers are submitting to the heavenly authority and receiving the heavenly discipline, control, and training. In the future, the kingdom of the heavens is the manifestation of the ruling of the heavens during the millennial kingdom. At that time, the Lord Jesus and the overcoming saints will be ruling over the world. The third heaven is in heaven; the kingdom of the heavens is on the earth.

THE DIFFERENCE BETWEEN THE KINGDOM OF THE HEAVENS AND THE CHURCH

The church is neither a physical building, nor a place, nor an organization, nor a denomination, nor an evangelistic group. *The church* in the original language is *ekklesia,* which means "the assembly of the called-out ones." The church is a group of people whom God has called out from the world. The totality of this people on one hand is the Body of Christ (Eph. 1:23); on the other hand, it is the house of God (1 Tim. 3:15). *The Body of Christ* denotes both the relationship and function of the church to Christ. *The house of God* denotes both the relationship and the function of the church to God. Related to Christ, the church came out of Christ and has His life. Hence, the church is the Body, the fullness of Christ—His continuation, extension, and spreading. It is able to express and testify Christ anytime and anywhere. Related to God, the church was born of God and has His life. Hence, the church is God's household, His dwelling place, enabling Him to have a place on the earth where He can rest, express His desire, fulfill His purpose, and manifest His glory.

We have to be clear about one thing: the church is different from Christianity. In the world's eyes, Christianity is the church. But in the eyes of God and in the eyes of those who know God, there is a great difference between Christianity and the church. Christianity is that which men have organized in the world; the church is that which God has delivered out of the world. Christianity is the religious organization, that is, the outward appearance of the kingdom of the heavens; the church is a living organism, that is, the Body of Christ and the spiritual dwelling of God.

To be a part of Christianity requires only a ritual of being baptized and joining Christianity. By this, one can become a nominal Christian. To participate in the church requires regeneration through repentance to God and faith in Christ, causing one to become a member of Christ and a child of God. In the world's eyes, those who are in Christianity are in the church. However, in God's eyes, those who are in Christianity may not all be in the church. This is because in Christianity there are many who have not been regenerated through repentance to God and faith in Christ. Hence, they are neither the members of Christ nor the children of God.

The church is the Body of Christ and the house of God as well, while the kingdom of the heavens is a heavenly kingdom. *The church* denotes a believer's position and blessing along with his life and function; *the kingdom of the heavens* denotes a believer's living and responsibility today with his authority and glory in the future. The church is the grace which a believer receives; the kingdom of the heavens is the training which a believer receives today and the reward which he receives in the future. A believer in the church is a member of Christ enjoying Christ as life and also a child of God enjoying the blessing in the house of God. A believer in the kingdom of the heavens is a heavenly subject submitting to the heavenly authority and receiving heavenly control and discipline today, and in the future he will be a heavenly king exercising heavenly authority to rule over the world and to enjoy heavenly glory and joy with Christ. As long as one has the life of God, he is in the church, but he must have a heavenly living in order to be in the kingdom of the heavens. All the saved ones are in the church, but not all the saved ones are in the kingdom of the heavens. This is because not every saved one is living in the reality of the kingdom of the heavens today, receiving the discipline of the kingdom. Nor will he be in the manifestation of the kingdom of the heavens in the future to receive the reward. Only those believers who are presently submitting to the heavenly authority, receiving the discipline of the kingdom of the heavens, are in the kingdom of the heavens today and will be thus able to enter into the manifestation of the kingdom of the heavens to reign as kings. Those who participate in the kingdom of the heavens, that is, the reality and the manifestation of the kingdom of the heavens, naturally participate in the church, but those who participate in the church may not necessarily participate in the kingdom of the heavens. A saved one merely participates in the church; a saved and overcoming one participates both in the church and in the kingdom of the heavens. To participate in the church

requires only salvation through faith, but to participate in the kingdom of the heavens requires further seeking to overcome, submitting to heavenly authority, and receiving heavenly control and discipline after experiencing salvation.

A COMPARISON OF THE KINGDOM OF THE HEAVENS, THE KINGDOM OF GOD, AND THE CHURCH

The appearance of the kingdom of the heavens has a very wide scope, including all who are called Christians, regardless of whether they are real or false. Not all those who are in the appearance of the kingdom of the heavens are in the church, because not all of them are saved. Only the saved ones among them are in the church. The scope of the church is therefore narrower than the scope of the appearance of the kingdom of the heavens. The church includes only those who are true believers, having the life of Christ.

All those who are in the church are also in the kingdom of God, because during the dispensation of the church, the church is the kingdom of God. The scope of the church and the scope of the kingdom of God during the dispensation of the church are the same. However, not all those who are in the church are in the reality of the kingdom of the heavens, because not all of them are overcomers. Only the overcomers in the church are in the reality of the kingdom of the heavens. Thus, the scope of the reality of the kingdom of the heavens is narrower than that of the church and the kingdom of God. It includes only the believers who are living a heavenly life and are overcomers.

Those who are being disciplined today in the reality of the kingdom of the heavens are those who will reign in the future in the manifestation of the kingdom of the heavens. Therefore, the scope of the reality of the kingdom of the heavens is equal to the scope of the manifestation of the kingdom of the heavens.

The appearance of the kingdom of the heavens, Christendom, is related to the nominal Christians. The church and the kingdom of God are related to the saved ones. The reality of the kingdom of the heavens and the manifestation of the kingdom of the heavens are related to the overcoming believers. A nominal Christian is only in the appearance of the kingdom of the heavens, that is, Christendom. A person who is merely saved is in the church and in the kingdom of God. Only those who are saved and seeking to overcome,

submitting to the heavenly authority, and receiving the heavenly discipline are in the reality of the kingdom of the heavens today and can enter into the manifestation of the kingdom of the heavens in the future.

According to God's original intention and salvation, there should not be these differences and comparisons. God's original intention was to make the kingdom of the heavens, the kingdom of God, and the church the same in scope during the dispensation of the church. The church is the kingdom of God. The kingdom of God is the kingdom of the heavens (Matt. 16:18-19). Those who are in the church are those who are in the kingdom of God; those who are in the kingdom of God are also those who are in the kingdom of the heavens. The scope of the three are the same, but their definitions differ. The church denotes the position of the believers—called out of the world and standing outside of the world. *The church* in Greek is *ekklesia,* meaning "the called-out ones assembling together." *The kingdom of God* denotes the life of the believers, which is of God and is capable of living within the realm of God. All those who are in the kingdom of God are born of God (John 3:3, 5). *The kingdom of the heavens* denotes the living of the believers who are submitting to the heavenly ruling and receiving the heavenly discipline. The kingdom of the heavens is the ruling of the heavens. According to God's intention, the definitions of these three may be different, but their scope should be absolutely the same. All those who are in the church ought to be in the kingdom of God, and all those who are in the kingdom of God ought to be in the kingdom of the heavens. This is God's intention, and God's salvation has saved us to such an extent.

Why then did the scope of these three parts become different? Why is the scope of the appearance of the kingdom of the heavens wider than the scope of the church and the kingdom of God? And why is the scope of the reality of the kingdom of the heavens narrower than the scope of the church and the kingdom of God? These differences are due to the confusion of Satan and the degradation of the believers. If Satan had not brought in the false believers and if the real believers had not become degraded, then the scope of the kingdom of the heavens, the kingdom of God, and the church would be the same.

The appearance of the kingdom of the heavens is wider in scope than the church and the kingdom of God because Satan has put many tares, false believers, into Christianity. These false believers are apparently different from

the worldly people, but actually they are not. They are still worldly people with no change; they have merely outwardly put on the name of a Christian. Apparently, they are in the church, but actually, they are outside the church. The church differs from them just like she differs from the worldly people. Because these false ones have joined Christianity, Christianity has grown enormous and has become wider in scope than the church and the kingdom of God.

The scope of the reality of the kingdom of the heavens is narrower than that of the church and the kingdom of God because a great number of the believers in the church, that is, in the kingdom of God, have become degraded and have not met the standard of the kingdom of the heavens. Although all the saved believers are in the church and in the kingdom of God, many have fallen from the reality of the kingdom of the heavens. Although the defeated ones and the believers who are in the reality of the kingdom of the heavens are both in the church and in the kingdom of God, and are inseparable, the defeated ones have lost the heavenly position of the church and have neglected the divine life of the kingdom of God. The salvation of God has delivered them into the reality of the kingdom of the heavens, placing them on such an exalted position; yet due to their insubordination to the ruling of the kingdom of the heavens and their disobedience to the heavenly ruling and discipline, they have fallen away from God's salvation. The heavenly position of the church is as exalted as that of the reality of the kingdom of the heavens. The reality of the kingdom of the heavens is the heavenly position of the church. Their falling away from the reality of the kingdom of the heavens cannot reverse the fact that they are in the church, but it can cause them to lose the heavenly position of the church. Although they are still children of God, they are children who have fallen away from God's standard—the reality of the kingdom of the heavens. Although they are the heavenly people, they do not live like the heavenly people. They are the heavenly people who have fallen away from the heavenly ruling. Oh, how many fallen Christians there are today! Believers who have fallen away from God's salvation, from the level of God's salvation, from the heavenly position of the church, and from the reality of the kingdom of the heavens can be found everywhere. How many among the saved ones have not lost the position of God's salvation, the heavenly position of the church, and the nature of the reality of the kingdom of the heavens? A great number of Christians have fallen away from these. Therefore,

the scope of the reality of the kingdom of the heavens has become narrower than the scope of the church and the kingdom of God.

May the Lord be gracious to us so that we may stand on or return to the level of His salvation to be the Christians of His original intention. May we not lose the heavenly position of the church or neglect the divine life of the kingdom of God but be disciplined in the reality of the kingdom of the heavens today so that we may reign with Him in the manifestation of the kingdom of the heavens in the future.

CHAPTER FORTY-EIGHT

LIFE UNDER THE RULING OF THE KINGDOM

Scripture Reading: Ezek. 28:11-19; Isa. 14:12-20; Rev. 12:3-4; Rom. 14:17; 1 Cor. 3:9; 5:1-5; 6:6-7, 9-10; 3:13-15; Matt. 24:38-51; 25:1-30

What is the real meaning of the kingdom? A kingdom is a rule, a government, and the kingdom of God simply means the rule and government of God. From eternity to eternity God is the King, the sovereign almighty Ruler of the whole universe. The entire universe from eternity to eternity is the kingdom of God. According to Ezekiel 28:11-19 and Isaiah 14:12-20, one of the archangels, Lucifer, rebelled against God, and a number of the angels followed him in his rebellion (Rev. 12:3-4). After the creation of man, Lucifer, or Satan, came to induce man to rebel also. Due to these two rebellions—that of Satan with his angels and that of man—the ruling and government of God has been greatly interrupted, tested, and attacked. Instead of being under the rule and control of God, the earth has come under the rule and control of Satan and fallen man. This is the earthly kingdom. By the time the Lord Jesus came to the earth at His incarnation, nearly the whole earth was the kingdom of the earth, controlled by Satan and by man. The Lord Jesus came to work out God's intention of bringing His kingdom into this world. God's intention is to have the earth controlled by the heavens. For this reason He needs to bring His kingdom to the earth. The whole earth needs to be brought under a heavenly rule and government. The Lord Jesus came to bring the earth under the control of the kingdom of the heavens.

This is why John the Baptist cried, "Repent, for the kingdom of the heavens has drawn near" (Matt. 3:2). Men needed to repent and to come under the heavenly rule. When the Lord Jesus came with the kingdom of the heavens, He was rejected by the Jewish people; so He turned to the Gentiles and established His church among the Gentiles. Within the church He brought all things under the control and government of the heavens. In the church there is the heavenly rule and government, and there is the reality of the kingdom of the heavens. During the period of the church age, however, the kingdom of the heavens, the heavenly rule, is not manifested in an open way. Rather, it is a heavenly rule in a very mysterious and hidden way. Although it is not yet manifested, the reality of the heavenly rule is present. In the church at least

some of the Christians are under the ruling of the heavens. With them there is the reality of the kingdom of the heavens.

When the Lord Jesus comes back, He will subdue the whole world, and the kingdoms of this world will become the kingdom of our Lord. At that time the kingdom of the heavens will be manifested in an open way (Rev. 11:15). The kingdom of the heavens will become the ruling power and will govern in a manifested, open way, not in a mysterious and hidden way. Now the kingdom of the heavens rules within the church in a hidden, mysterious way, but at that time the kingdom of the heavens will be fully manifested. The kingdom of the heavens simply means the heavenly rule and government. If you are in the reality of the kingdom of the heavens, you are under the control and rule of the heavens.

When the Lord Jesus turned the kingdom of the heavens to the church, He brought a group of people out of the world to be under the heavenly control. Through regeneration all the Christians have been brought into the kingdom of the heavens. This means that all Christians by their regeneration have been brought under the control of the heavens. This is a marvelous beginning, but after such a good beginning through regeneration, not many are willing to be controlled by the heavens. Therefore, they are regenerated and saved by the Lord, yet they are defeated. They had a good beginning, but they did not have a good continuation. They were brought into the kingdom by their new birth, but they did not continue practically in the kingdom by being willing to be controlled by the heavenly rule. Within the church the true believers have been regenerated and brought into the kingdom of God. But among these true believers many are defeated. Only a small number are victorious and overcoming. The overcomers are the ones who are willing to be under the control of the kingdom of the heavens. They are willing to live and walk and do things according to the teachings of the Lord concerning the reality of the kingdom in Matthew 5—7. They are sanctified; they are victorious over sin, self, the flesh, and the world; and they are in the process of being transformed.

Let me cite some examples to help you understand the meaning of being under the rule of the heavens. In a university there are many students who are unsaved; there are other students who are regenerated, saved Christians, but who are not victorious and overcoming. Rather, they are defeated. Only a small number of the Christians are victorious and overcoming. Because most

of the students may be naughty, they need to be controlled by the administration of the school. If, however, you are a Christian under the rule of the kingdom of the heavens, you should not need the control of the administration of the school. If the rules say that the lights must be off by ten thirty, you should not need someone to come by and enforce this rule. The unbelievers and the defeated Christians may even cover the light and continue to study until two o'clock in the morning. If you did such a thing and you were under the rule of the kingdom of the heavens, you would surely repent and go to the school administration, apologizing and offering to pay for the electricity. If you are under the rule of the kingdom of the heavens, there is no need for anyone to control you. If we need policemen to control us, it means we are defeated Christians. We must be those heavenly people who are under a heavenly ruling, a heavenly control, and a heavenly government. We should have no need of any other kind of control.

Even cultured, educated ladies and gentlemen will sometimes steal something when they have an opportunity. This means that they are simply under the control of this earth; they are not under the control of the heavens. If the police were removed from any major city, what confusion and chaos would result! This is because people today are under the control of the earth and the earthly government and not under the control of the kingdom of the heavens.

As the heavenly people, we must be under the heavenly control, under the kingdom of the heavens. This is the reality of the kingdom of the heavens. God's intention in regenerating us is to bring us under His heavenly control. But many of us, after being regenerated, are not willing to be controlled by the heavenly ruling; we are in the church, but we are not in the reality of the kingdom of the heavens.

The kingdom of the heavens belongs to those who are poor in spirit, who are pure in heart, who are meek, whose righteousness exceeds that of the Pharisees, and who do the will of God. Whoever lives in such a way is in the kingdom of the heavens, and the kingdom of the heavens is theirs. The Word does not say *shall be* yours but *is* yours. When we are pure in heart and poor in spirit, the kingdom is ours. This means that we are in the kingdom now, and we are under the ruling of the kingdom of the heavens now.

THE KINGDOM BEING RIGHTEOUSNESS,

PEACE, AND JOY

In Romans 14:17 the apostle Paul says, “The kingdom of God is not eating and drinking, but righteousness and peace and joy in the Holy Spirit.” In dealing with ourselves we must be righteous; with others we must have peace; before God we must have joy. If we are lacking any one of these three things, it means that we are wrong. It indicates that we are not living in the reality of the kingdom of the heavens. Many years ago I thought that all Christians were wonderful, but now I realize that many Christians are very selfish. They are not under the control of the heavens. They are not strict in dealing with themselves so that they may be righteous; they do not have the full peace with others; and they do not have joy before God and with God. If you are under the control of the heavens, you will deal with yourself according to righteousness, you will keep peace with others, and you will be joyful before and with God. This is the heavenly ruling, the heavenly government, and it is the reality of the kingdom of the heavens.

You may be a regenerated member of the church and yet not be under the control of the heavens. Although you are in the church, you are not in the reality of the kingdom of the heavens. If you are a defeated Christian, not living in the reality of the kingdom of the heavens, where will you be when the Lord Jesus comes back? Some have taught in the past that although you are defeated now, when the Lord Jesus comes back, you will be treated the same as the overcoming, victorious ones, and you will go into the manifestation of the kingdom of the heavens to be a king with the Lord. This is not logical.

THE KINGDOM AS AN INHERITANCE

Consider the case in 1 Corinthians 5. A brother who was in the church in Corinth committed a sin that even the worldly people would condemn. Let us read 1 Corinthians 5:1 and 5: “It is actually reported that there is fornication among you, and such fornication that does not even occur among the Gentiles, that someone has his stepmother...To deliver such a one to Satan for the destruction of his flesh, that his spirit may be saved in the day of the Lord.” When the Lord Jesus comes back, will such a sinful one be lost? No! Verse 5 says, “That his spirit may be saved in the day of the Lord.”

When the Lord Jesus comes back, surely the apostle Paul will be transferred into the manifestation of the kingdom of the heavens and rule as a

king with the Lord Jesus because he had already been living in the reality of the kingdom of the heavens. But what about that sinful brother in Corinth? Do you think that he was living in the reality of the kingdom of the heavens? He was in the church in Corinth, but he was not in the reality of the kingdom of the heavens. As such a defeated, sinful believer, surely he will not be transferred into the manifestation of the kingdom of the heavens to rule and reign with the Lord.

Let us also read 1 Corinthians 6:6-7: "Brother goes to court with brother, and this before unbelievers. Already then it is altogether a defeat to you that you have lawsuits with one another. Why not rather be wronged? Why not rather be defrauded?" The Lord's attitude toward the brother who was in fornication and toward those who were defrauding one another is in verses 9 and 10: "Do you not know that the unrighteous will not inherit the kingdom of God? Do not be led astray; neither fornicators nor idolaters nor adulterers nor effeminate nor homosexuals nor thieves nor the covetous, not drunkards, not revilers, not the rapacious will inherit the kingdom of God." Chapter 5 shows that a fornicator is still saved, but chapter 6 shows that such a person cannot inherit the kingdom of God. The Word does not say that he cannot enter the kingdom of God but that he cannot inherit the kingdom of God. There is a big difference between entering the kingdom of God and inheriting the kingdom of God. To enter the kingdom of God, we simply need a new birth (John 3:3, 5). But to inherit the kingdom of God, we need to live in the reality of the kingdom of the heavens now.

When will the overcomers, the victorious ones, inherit the kingdom of God? Surely that will be at the time when the Lord Jesus comes back. The kingdom today is not an enjoyment but an exercise. Today we are not enjoying or inheriting; today we are exercising. But when the Lord Jesus comes back, the kingdom will be an enjoyment to us. At that time we will enjoy the kingdom, and we will be kings ruling with the Lord Jesus. The kingdom will be an inheritance to us. To be saved into the kingdom is one thing; to inherit the kingdom of God is another thing.

SUFFERING A LOSS

When the Lord Jesus comes back, the apostle Paul will inherit the manifestation of the kingdom. But what about the sinful brother in 1 Corinthians 5? Will he inherit the kingdom of God? No! What will happen to

him? The answer to this is found in 1 Corinthians 3:13-15: "The work of each will become manifest; for the day will declare it, because it is revealed by fire, and the fire itself will prove each one's work, of what sort it is. If anyone's work which he has built upon the foundation remains, he will receive a reward; if anyone's work is consumed, he will suffer loss, but he himself will be saved, yet so as through fire." When the Lord Jesus returns, the fire will prove each one's work. If anyone's work remains, he will receive not salvation but a reward. These verses are not related to the security of our salvation; they are related to whether we will receive a reward or suffer loss when the Lord Jesus comes back. Verse 15 says, "He will suffer loss, but he himself will be saved, yet so as through fire." Do not consider that as long as you are saved, there is no problem. To be saved is one thing, and to be rewarded or to suffer loss is another. You can be saved and yet still suffer loss. And even though you suffer loss, you will still be saved. Once we are saved, we can never be lost (John 10:28-29). But once we are saved, we can either be rewarded by the Lord or suffer loss.

THE EXERCISE OF THE KINGDOM

The kingdom of the heavens is used by God for two purposes: first is for the exercise of His children, and second is for a reward to His children. Today the kingdom of the heavens is an exercise. Do not say that we have been saved by grace and that everything is by grace. Yes, we do have Christ as grace, but we also have the kingdom as an exercise. Even with a proper family life there are these two sides. In the Bible there is surely the side of enjoyment and grace, but there is also the side of exercise and responsibility. Christ is the grace, and the kingdom is the exercise. By His resurrection the Lord Jesus has regenerated us (1 Pet. 1:3). But now that we are regenerated, we must be exercised in the kingdom. We are not simply in the home of God; we are also in the kingdom of God. The home is a place for grace and enjoyment, but the kingdom is a place for exercise. Many Christians simply enjoy the family life of the household of God, but they neglect the exercise of the kingdom life. The kingdom of the heavens is used by God to cause us to exercise.

THE REWARD OF THE KINGDOM

The kingdom of the heavens is also used by God as a reward to His faithful children. If we exercise ourselves in a proper way after we are saved, we will enjoy the manifestation of the kingdom of the heavens as a reward. Today the

kingdom of the heavens is an exercise to us, but tomorrow it will be an enjoyment to us. The big question is whether or not we will be qualified to inherit the kingdom of the heavens. God is very gracious, but He is also very wise. He saves us by His grace, but in His wisdom He causes us to be exercised by the kingdom, and He will reward us with the kingdom. If we are defeated, when He comes back, surely He will punish us. We will not enjoy the manifestation of the kingdom of the heavens as our inheritance.

Now let us read Matthew 24:37-44: "Just as the days of Noah were, so will the coming of the Son of Man be. For as they were in those days before the flood, eating and drinking, marrying and giving in marriage, until the day in which Noah entered into the ark, and they did not know that judgment was coming until the flood came and took all away, so also will the coming of the Son of Man be. At that time two men will be in the field; one is taken and one is left. Two women will be grinding at the mill; one is taken and one is left. Watch therefore, for you do not know on what day your Lord comes. But know this, that if the householder had known in which watch the thief was coming, he would have watched and would not have allowed his house to be broken into. For this reason you also be ready, because at an hour when you do not expect it, the Son of Man is coming." These verses show that the Lord Jesus will come back, not as a visitor but as a thief, either to steal you away or to leave you here. When the thief comes, he always steals only precious things. If you are a precious one when the Lord Jesus comes back, you will be stolen away, but if you are a defeated believer, you will not be so precious to the Lord, so He will not take you away. The Lord's words were, "Be ready, because at an hour when you do not expect it, the Son of Man is coming."

Let us also read Matthew 24:45-51: "Who then is the faithful and prudent slave, whom the master has set over his household to give them food at the proper time? Blessed is that slave whom his master, when he comes, will find so doing. Truly I say to you that he will set him over all his possessions. But if that evil slave says in his heart, My master delays, and begins to beat his fellow slaves and eats and drinks with the drunken, the master of that slave will come on a day when he does not expect him and at an hour which he does not know, and will cut him asunder and appoint his portion with the hypocrites. In that place there will be the weeping and the gnashing of teeth." Do not consider that the slave who was cut off signifies an unbeliever. The fact that he is a slave indicates that he is saved. Consider your own situation: you are saved, but are you a faithful slave of the Lord? Are you the first slave or

the second? If you are the first slave, the Lord Jesus will set you over all His possessions when He comes back. But if you are the second, you will be cut off from this ruling manifestation and, furthermore, you will suffer. You will weep and gnash your teeth.

THE PARABLE OF THE TEN VIRGINS

This section continues with Matthew 25:1. *At that time* indicates that chapter 25 is a continuation of chapter 24. The phrase *the kingdom of the heavens* indicates that the previous discourse is also related to the kingdom of the heavens. In chapter 25 the kingdom of the heavens is likened to ten virgins, who took their lamps and went forth to meet the bridegroom. Each of the ten had a lamp, indicating that each was regenerated. But five of them were prudent, and five were foolish. Those who were foolish took their lamps but took no oil with them in their vessels. Their lamps were lit, but they did not have an extra portion of oil. The prudent, however, took oil in their vessels with their lamps. They had oil in their lamps and also another portion of oil in their vessels. Oil, of course, is a type of the Spirit of God. The Spirit of God is in our regenerated spirit. But besides this portion of the Spirit, we need to have another portion, that is, the filling of the Spirit in our soul, our vessel. We need to have a portion of the Spirit in addition to what we received in our spirit at regeneration.

Verse 5 says that while the bridegroom delayed, they all became drowsy and slept. Not only did the five foolish ones become drowsy and sleep, but the prudent ones also became drowsy and slept. Sleep here indicates death (1 Thes. 4:15). This means that all ten of the virgins died. Because the Lord has tarried these many years, saint after saint has died, including those who are overcomers. This indicates that the ten virgins do not represent the living saints but the dead saints. Since the number signifying the church is twelve and not ten, where are the other two saints? They were included in the previous chapter. In Matthew 24:40-41 the Lord indicated that two men may be in the field or that two women may be grinding at the mill. These two represent the living ones at the time of the Lord Jesus' return. When the Lord returns, the majority of the Christians will have died. Ten is the majority of twelve. This is the principle in the Scriptures. In the Old Testament time ten tribes rebelled against the house of David. Only two were left—Judah and Benjamin. This means that the majority of the tribes rebelled. When the Lord Jesus returns, the majority of the Christians will have died, and only a

minority will still be living. The ten virgins represent the dead saints. Due to the Lord's tarrying, all these will have become drowsy and slept. In 1 Thessalonians 4:13-15 Paul uses the word *asleep* to indicate those who have died. We must see that the ten virgins represent the majority of the Christians who will have died by the time the Lord comes back. Not only the foolish ones will have died, but also the prudent ones will have died.

At midnight the cry came: "Behold, the bridegroom!" (Matt. 25:6). Then all the virgins arose and trimmed their lamps. This means they rose up in resurrection. The dead saints rose up and trimmed their lamps. The foolish then asked for oil from the prudent virgins. Their own lamps were going out, and they had no oil in their vessels. Since their lamps were going out, it means they were lit, indicating that they are saved. Even the foolish ones had their lamps lit, but they did not have an extra portion of the oil for further use. The foolish virgins were told that they needed to go and buy the oil for themselves. While they went to buy, the bridegroom came, and those who were ready went in with him to the wedding feast, and the door was shut. Afterward, the foolish virgins came desiring to enter into the wedding feast, but the bridegroom's reply was that he did not know them. The foolish virgins suffered a great loss; they were unable to enter into the wedding feast.

When the Lord Jesus returns, all the dead saints will be resurrected, and those who are ready will enjoy the wedding feast. In other words, as the Lord's cultivated land (1 Cor. 3:9), they are matured and ripe, so they are ready to enter into the wedding feast of the Lamb. The wedding feast is simply the one thousand years of the millennium. The wedding day of the Lord Jesus will be one thousand years long. Your wedding day only lasted one day, but the wedding day of the Lord will last a thousand years. To the Lord a thousand years are just like one day (2 Pet. 3:8). The millennium will be the wedding day to the Lord, and that day will be the wedding feast. If you are ready, if you are ripened, if you are victorious, the Lord will invite you into that wedding feast. That wedding feast is also the manifestation of the kingdom of the heavens.

Suppose you are not ripened and victorious, yet you die before the Lord Jesus comes back. When He comes back, you will be resurrected, and the Lord will tell you to go and buy the oil. You will not be ready to enjoy the manifestation of the kingdom of the heavens. You will not be ready to go into the wedding feast, so you will have to pay the price and suffer something.

Why did the Lord tell them that He did not know them? In Matthew 25:12 the Greek word is translated into "know," but in Romans 7:15 the same Greek word is translated into "acknowledge." If you translate this word into "acknowledge" in Matthew 25, it will be easy to understand. It means "I do not acknowledge you." It means the Lord never approved. The Lord did not approve of what they had been doing after they were saved. For the Lord to say that He did not know them means that He did not acknowledge them. They did many things, but it was not the Lord who allowed them to do so. What then shall the foolish virgins do? They will have to pay the price to gain the other portion of oil, to become ripened and matured.

Suppose a person believes in the Lord, but after he has believed in the Lord and been saved, he does not seek the Lord and love the Lord. Rather, he lives just like a worldly person. After twenty years he dies, without being ripened, without being matured. When the Lord Jesus comes back, surely He will deal with that person. Do you think that he is ready to meet the Lord? The apostle Paul is ready, but that person is not. The apostle Paul is matured and ripe, but he is not. In principle, surely the Lord has to do something to make that person ripe and mature. In principle, he must pay some price to become ripe. Although the Lord does not give us the details, we can see in principle that the defeated Christians will not be ready to enjoy the manifestation of the kingdom of the heavens. They will have to pay something and suffer some loss in order to be matured.

THE PARABLE OF THE TALENTS

The second parable in Matthew 25, the parable of the talents, shows the same principle. All are slaves, and yet some are not allowed to enter into the manifestation of the kingdom of the heavens. Let us read from verse 22: "He who had received the two talents also came and said, Master, you delivered to me two talents; behold, I have gained another two talents. His master said to him, Well done, good and faithful slave. You were faithful over a few things; I will set you over many things. Enter into the joy of your master. Then he who had received the one talent also came and said, Master, I knew about you, that you are a hard man, reaping where you did not sow, and gathering where you did not winnow. And I was afraid and went off and hid your talent in the earth; behold, you have what is yours. And his master answered and said to him, Evil and slothful slave, you knew that I reap where I did not sow and gather where I did not winnow. Therefore you should have deposited my money with

the money changers; and when I came, I would have recovered what is mine with interest. Take away therefore the talent from him and give it to him who has the ten talents. For to everyone who has, more shall be given, and he shall abound; but from him who does not have, even that which he has shall be taken away from him. And cast out the useless slave into the outer darkness. In that place there will be the weeping and the gnashing of teeth." The faithful slaves were invited into the joy of their master, but the slothful slave was rebuked by the master and cast into the outer darkness where he would experience weeping and gnashing of teeth. The slothful slave was punished so that he might become ripe and matured.

A SERIOUS WARNING

The kingdom of the heavens is the heavenly ruling, the heavenly government of the Lord Jesus. After we have been regenerated, we have to be under this ruling. If we are under this ruling, we will be victorious and overcoming. We will be in the reality of the kingdom of the heavens, and we will enter into the manifestation of the kingdom of the heavens to rule and reign with the Lord. But if we are defeated Christians, when the Lord Jesus comes back, we will suffer a loss, and we will be punished so that we may become mature. When the Lord returns, we will be rewarded or punished according to our exercise in the kingdom. If our exercise has been proper in the kingdom of the heavens, the Lord will reward us with the manifestation of the kingdom. If we have not exercised in the kingdom of the heavens, the Lord will render a certain kind of punishment to us. This does not mean that we will be lost but that we will suffer something to help us ripen. We are the Lord's children, His crop, His cultivated land (1 Cor. 3:9). As the Lord's crop, we must eventually be matured, whether in this age or the next. If we are not willing to be ripened in this age, when the Lord Jesus comes back, He will deal with us, and we will be forced to be ripened in the next age. On the one hand, we have eternal security; once we are saved, we are saved forever. But on the other hand, there is a serious warning. Today the Lord gives us the kingdom of the heavens as an exercise to test us. When He comes back, He will give us the kingdom of the heavens as a reward if we exercise ourselves properly. Otherwise, He will render a certain kind of punishment to us so that we can pay the price to be ripened. May the Lord be gracious to all of us.

CHAPTER FORTY-NINE

THE EXERCISE OF THE KINGDOM

Scripture Reading: 1 Cor. 3:12-15; Luke 12:42-47; Matt. 24:37-51; 25:1-13; Acts 14:22; John 3:5; 1 Cor. 5:1, 5; 6:9-10; Eph. 5:3-5; Gal. 5:19-21; 2 Thes. 1:5; 1 Cor. 9:24-27; Phil. 3:13-15; 2 Tim. 4:1, 6-8, 18

THE ETERNAL LIFE OF GOD FULFILLING THE REQUIREMENTS OF THE KINGDOM

As we pointed out in a previous chapter, the first gospel preaching, preached both by John the Baptist and the Lord Jesus, was concerning the kingdom of the heavens. Because of our natural concepts, we are prone to consider that the first item of the New Testament gospel is the forgiveness of sins, and the second item is eternal life. Negatively, our sins have been forgiven, and positively, we have eternal life. But in fact the first word of the New Testament gospel was to repent for the sake of the kingdom of the heavens (Matt. 3:2; 4:17). We need forgiveness of sins so that we can have eternal life, and we need eternal life so that we can be under the heavenly rule. The kingdom is the requirement of the gospel, and the life is the supply of the gospel. What the gospel requires, it also supplies. The gospel requires us to be governed and ruled by the heavens. The gospel also supplies us with the divine life for us to fulfill the requirements of the kingdom.

As Christians who are born from above, we should not need any kind of earthly government to rule over us. We already have the heavenly government ruling over us. This is the real meaning of the kingdom of the heavens. The kingdom is simply the requirement of the gospel. The gospel requires us not only to be sinless but also to be controlled and ruled by the heavenly government.

If we are going to meet the requirements of such a high standard, we must have a life that is on an equally high plane. Otherwise, we cannot meet such a high standard. Only the divine life can meet such a high standard. Only the divine life can meet the requirements of the heavenly government. The kingdom is the requirement of the New Testament gospel, and the eternal life,

which is Christ Himself, is the supply. The divine life can fulfill the requirements of the kingdom. Once we see the matter of the kingdom, we can see how high a standard is required by the gospel. After we are saved, we have a heavenly requirement within us demanding us to live on a high level. This level can be reached only by the supply of the divine life.

THE WISDOM AND JUSTICE OF GOD

The kingdom is also related to the wisdom and justice of God. The kingdom proves both the wisdom and the justice of God. Without the kingdom God's wisdom and justice cannot be proved to the fullest extent. Also, apart from the truth concerning the kingdom, it is very difficult to solve the debate between Calvinism and Arminianism. The Calvinists stress eternal security, while the Arminians stress that one can lose his salvation. For many generations these two groups have been quarreling and debating. Both of these sides have their points. The Calvinists can point out many passages that prove eternal security. The Arminians, however, will bring up other passages, such as Hebrews 6 and 10, which seem to indicate that a person could be saved and then could fall and be lost again. Without the kingdom truth these two extremes can never be reconciled.

There is no doubt that once we have been saved, we are saved forever. Our salvation is eternally secure. But on the other hand, besides God's salvation, there is God's wisdom. There is the truth concerning the kingdom. In addition to salvation, there is the matter of the kingdom. Today the kingdom is an exercise for us. After we were saved, God set the kingdom before us as an exercise. In a sense we are born in God's home, but we are exercised in God's kingdom. The home is a place for birth and enjoyment, but the kingdom is a place for exercise and responsibility. After we have been regenerated, we must be exercised. The home is the place to enjoy grace, but the kingdom is the place to exercise responsibility. We should not take one and neglect the other. We have to take the grace, and we also have to take the responsibility. We have to take the home, and we also have to take the kingdom. We enjoy and share in the home by partaking of the grace. We share in the kingdom by being exercised to take the responsibility. Today, in the church age, the kingdom is an exercise to us. In the age to come, the millennium, the kingdom will be a reward to us. If we exercise well today, the Lord will reward us at that day. If we do not exercise well today, we will lose the reward of the kingdom. By this the wisdom of God is proved, and the justice of God is maintained.

THE EXERCISE OF THE KINGDOM

We need to read a number of passages which indicate that in addition to salvation there is the exercise of the kingdom. First Corinthians 3:12-15 says, "If anyone builds upon the foundation gold, silver, precious stones, wood, grass, stubble, the work of each will become manifest; for the day will declare it, because it is revealed by fire, and the fire itself will prove each one's work, of what sort it is. If anyone's work which he has built upon the foundation remains, he will receive a reward; if anyone's work is consumed, he will suffer loss, but he himself will be saved, yet so as through fire." These few verses show clearly that if we exercise properly, we will receive a reward, but if we do not exercise properly, we will suffer loss. It does not mean that we will lose our salvation but that we will suffer loss. Both the reward and the loss are something in addition to salvation. Once we receive salvation, we have it eternally. But besides salvation there is the matter of the reward or the loss. We must realize that after we are saved, we are put into the kingdom to exercise. Because we are born again, we must be under the control of the heavenly kingdom, under the heavenly rule and government. For this exercise there will be a reward or a loss. There is no problem concerning salvation, but there is a problem concerning the exercise.

A FAITHFUL AND PRUDENT STEWARD

Now let us read Luke 12:42-47: "The Lord said, Who then is the faithful and prudent steward, whom the master will set over his service to give them their portion of food at the proper time? Blessed is that slave whom his master, when he comes, will find so doing. Truly I tell you that he will set him over all his possessions. But if that slave says in his heart, My master is delaying his coming, and begins to beat the male servants and the female servants and to eat and to drink and become drunk, the master of that slave will come on a day when he does not expect him and at an hour which he does not know, and will cut him asunder, and will appoint his portion with the unbelievers. And that slave who knew his master's will and did not prepare or do according to his will, will receive many lashes." If the steward is faithful, the master, at his coming back, will set him over all his possessions. But if he is not faithful, that steward will be cut asunder and will have his portion with the unbelievers. Please notice that there are two possibilities for the same steward. Both possibilities refer to the same person. This is a matter of the reward of the kingdom. Today we are in the kingdom to be ruled, but in the next age we will

be in the kingdom to rule. Today the kingdom is an exercise, but in the next age the manifestation of the kingdom will be a reward. First we must be ruled, and then we can rule over something. If we have never been ruled, we can never rule over something. We must be exercised in this age so that we will be qualified to rule in the next age. The present age is the age for the Lord to discipline His children and to prepare His kings. We all must be prepared. As a steward, you must learn how to take care of the household of the Lord. You must learn how to be exercised to be a king and to rule. Then when the Lord comes back, you will be appointed to rule in the kingdom. At that time the manifestation of the kingdom of the heavens will be a reward to you.

There are two possibilities for the same slave. The first possibility is that he would be faithful and be set over all his master's possessions. The second possibility is that he would be a slothful slave and be punished by his master. Some Christians have the wrong concept that these are two different slaves. They think that one is the real slave, and the other is the false slave. But by careful reading, we can see that these are not two different slaves. It is the same slave with two different possibilities. Instead of being faithful, the slave may quarrel with the brothers and sisters and may beat them. When his master comes, he will surely cut him asunder and appoint his portion with the unbelievers. He is a believer, but he will suffer in that time as an unbeliever. This does not mean that he will lose his salvation. This means that he will suffer some loss. When the Lord comes back, he will be beaten. Some Christians would argue that when the Lord comes back, we all will simply be resurrected and taken up to be with Him. They cannot imagine that the Lord would punish any believers. It is not my word which says that the master will beat the slave. The Bible says that he will beat the slave.

We must see several points very clearly. Surely this steward is saved, because once we are saved, we can never be lost. Yet because of his unfaithfulness, the steward will suffer a beating from his master. The master will reward the faithful one and will punish the unfaithful one.

FOUR DISPENSATIONS OF THE LORD'S DEALINGS

We must realize that there are four dispensations, or ages, in which the Lord will accomplish His work. There was the age of Adam to Moses (Rom. 5:14), the age of Moses to Christ (John 1:17), the age of the church, and the age of the millennium. The last of these four ages, the millennium, will be an

age of restoration but not an age of perfection. This means that it will still be an age of dealing, an age for the Lord to accomplish something. During the time of the millennium, there will still be some curse left upon the earth. Some will die, and even at the end of the millennium, the nations will rebel. This proves that the millennium is not the age of perfection but the age of restoration. The Lord's dealing with the believers is mainly in two ages: the church age and the millennium. If we are willing to be dealt with by the Lord to the fullest extent in this age, we will enjoy the reward in the next age. But if we are not willing to be dealt with by the Lord to the fullest extent in this age, He will still deal with us when He comes back. At one time or another we must be dealt with—either in this age or the next. But there is a big difference. If we are willing to be dealt with by the Lord in this age, we will be rewarded. If not, we will be punished during the next age. Either way we will be dealt with by the Lord.

Why would the Lord still deal with us during the next age? It is because we are His harvest, His crop. As a crop, we must be ripe; otherwise, the husbandman cannot receive us into the barn. If we would not be ripened in this age, the Lord will make us ripe in the next age. If we are not matured in this age by the time the Lord comes back, He will cause us to be matured in the next age. For a crop to be matured is a fixed principle. We must be matured. As the Lord's crop we must be mature and ripe. If we are willing to be ripened and matured in this age, the Lord will reward us for this willingness. If we are not willing to be matured and ripened in this age, the Lord will cause us to be matured and ripened in the next age, but we will suffer.

Many Christians today mistakenly think that once they die, everything will be all right. That can never be! Even after we die, whatever problems we have with the Lord will still remain. If we are not ready and mature before we die, we remain in the same condition after we die. Then, when the Lord Jesus comes back and we are resurrected, He will tell us that we are not ready and that we need to pay the price to become ripe and mature. This principle is quite logical. On the one hand, it corresponds with Calvinism, which says that we are saved eternally, and on the other hand, it corrects Arminianism, by the fact that we will not be lost again but that we may suffer some punishment. At the Lord's coming back, immature believers will not be lost, yet they will suffer some kind of punishment. If we are not living in the reality of the kingdom of the heavens today, under the control of the heavenly rule, we will

not be able to go into the manifestation of the kingdom in the next age as a reward. If we want to enter into the manifestation of the kingdom in the next age, we must live in the reality of the kingdom of the heavens today. In other words, if we would rule in the next age, we must be ruled in this age. We must be exercised in the matter of the kingdom in order to enter into the kingdom to rule.

The kingdom is the requirement of the gospel, and the life we receive at regeneration is the supply of this requirement. It is not a loose and light matter to become a Christian. It is a very serious matter. We have been saved, and we have been born into a royal, heavenly family. Therefore, we have to be exercised in a heavenly way and to be ruled and governed by a heavenly rule in order to be qualified to be heavenly kings in the next age.

EXERCISE IN THE NEW TESTAMENT

Many verses in the New Testament show the need of exercise for the kingdom. Acts 14:22 says, "Establishing the souls of the disciples, exhorting them to continue in the faith and saying that through many tribulations we must enter into the kingdom of God." By comparing this verse with John 3:5, we can see a great difference. John 3:5 simply says that by being born of water and of the Spirit we can enter into the kingdom of God. According to John, entering the kingdom is a matter of another birth. But Acts 14 says that we must suffer many tribulations to enter into the kingdom of God. These two verses show two aspects. To enter into the kingdom of God is one thing, and to enter into it in the way of inheritance is another. If we would inherit the kingdom of God, we must suffer the tribulation. We must be tested and exercised.

We can see the same principle in 1 Corinthians 5 and 6. Chapter 5 indicates that a brother who committed a terrible fornication will still be saved. Even such a sinful, defeated believer will still be saved. But in chapter 6 we are told that fornicators will not inherit the kingdom of God. This means that such a fornicator cannot enjoy or inherit the kingdom of the heavens as a reward.

Now let us read Ephesians 5:3-5: "But fornication and all uncleanness or greediness, let it not even be named among you, as is fitting for saints, and obscenity and foolish talking or sly, filthy jesting, which are not becoming, but rather the giving of thanks. For this you realize, knowing that every fornicator

or unclean person or greedy person (who is an idolater) has no inheritance in the kingdom of Christ and of God." The kingdom of Christ and of God is the part of the kingdom of God which is the kingdom of the heavens. As a whole, it is the kingdom of God, but particularly, it is the kingdom of the heavens. In the kingdom of God and of Christ there is no inheritance for the sinful one. If you are still in filthiness and sinfulness, although you are a saint, a saved one, you will have no inheritance in the kingdom of Christ and of God.

Galatians 5:19-21 says, "The works of the flesh are manifest, which are such things as fornication, uncleanness, lasciviousness, idolatry, sorcery, enmities, strife, jealousy, outbursts of anger, factions, divisions, sects, envyings, bouts of drunkenness, carousings, and things like these, of which I tell you beforehand, even as I have said before, that those who practice such things will not inherit the kingdom of God." Thus, three portions of the Bible—1 Corinthians 6, Ephesians 5, and Galatians 5—tell us basically the same thing: You may be a saved person, but if you are still living in sin and filthiness, you will not inherit the kingdom of God. You will have no share in the manifestation of the kingdom of the heavens, because you are not qualified.

Second Thessalonians 1:5 says, "A plain indication of the righteous judgment of God, that you may be accounted worthy of the kingdom of God, for which also you suffer." This verse indicates that to suffer persecution causes one to be worthy of the kingdom of God. This can enable one to inherit the kingdom of God.

Let us also read 2 Timothy 4:18, 7-8, 1: "The Lord will deliver me from every evil work and will save me into His heavenly kingdom, to whom be the glory forever and ever. Amen...I have fought the good fight; I have finished the course; I have kept the faith. Henceforth there is laid up for me the crown of righteousness, with which the Lord, the righteous Judge, will recompense me in that day, and not only me but also all those who have loved His appearing...I solemnly charge you before God and Christ Jesus, who is to judge the living and the dead, and by His appearing and His kingdom." These verses, written near the end of Paul's life, indicate that he was sure of being in the heavenly kingdom because he had fought the good fight, he had run the course well, and he had kept the faith.

THE EXAMPLE OF THE APOSTLE PAUL

Surely we have been saved eternally, but whether or not we will be able to share in the manifestation of the kingdom is the problem. As a concluding word we need to consider the history of the apostle Paul. First, let us read 1 Corinthians 9:24-27: “Do you not know that those who run on a racecourse all run, but one receives the prize? Run in this way, that you may lay hold. And everyone who contends exercises self-control in all things; they then, that they may receive a corruptible crown, but we, an incorruptible. I therefore run in this way, not as though without a clear aim; I box in this way, not as though beating the air; but I buffet my body and make it my slave, lest perhaps having preached to others, I myself may become disapproved.” Surely Paul had the assurance that he was saved. Yet he emphatically told us that he was running the race. During the time that Paul was living, there were the Greek Olympic games, where people ran the races in order to receive a prize. Paul used this as his example, saying that he too was running a race to receive a prize.

Philippians 3:13-15 says, “Brothers, I do not account of myself to have laid hold; but one thing I do: Forgetting the things which are behind and stretching forward to the things which are before, I pursue toward the goal for the prize to which God in Christ Jesus has called me upward. Let us therefore, as many as are full-grown, have this mind; and if in anything you are otherwise minded, this also God will reveal to you.” At the time Paul wrote Philippians, he was old and had been with the Lord many years, but he was not yet certain that he had attained to the goal. Only at the time of the writing of 2 Timothy, which was close to the time of his martyrdom, did he have the assurance that he had reached the goal. This did not mean that he was not sure whether he was saved but that he was not sure whether he had gained the reward of the manifestation of the kingdom. When he wrote 2 Timothy, he was sure that the crown of righteousness was waiting for him. That is the crown to be a king. This means that when the Lord comes back, Paul will be rewarded with the manifestation of the kingdom of the heavens. We must be very clear: to be saved is one thing, and to be exercised in the kingdom is another. Today we need to be exercised so that tomorrow we can be rewarded.

CHAPTER FIFTY

A RICH ENTRANCE INTO THE KINGDOM

Scripture Reading: James 2:5; Luke 12:29-32; 9:62; 2 Tim. 4:1, 18; 2 Pet. 1:1, 3-11; 3:11-12a, 18

Nearly all the writers of the New Testament, including Paul, John, and Peter, had something to say about the kingdom. Luke also said something, and James, even in his short book, has a very sweet verse concerning the kingdom. "Listen, my beloved brothers: Did not God choose the poor in the world to be rich in faith and heirs of the kingdom, which He promised to those who love him?" (2:5). Not only are we those rich in faith, but we are also heirs of the kingdom, which God has promised to give to those who love Him. The kingdom is a matter of God's promise, and as such, is a gift. The kingdom is a free gift! God will give us the kingdom according to His promise. Luke, in his Gospel said the same thing: "Do not be afraid, little flock, because your Father has been well pleased to give you the kingdom" (12:32). Not only did God promise to give the kingdom to us, but He has been well pleased to do so. God is so happy to give us the kingdom. It is His good pleasure, His good intention, and His joy to give us the kingdom.

WILLING TO RECEIVE THE KINGDOM

Although God is happy to give us the kingdom, are we willing to receive the kingdom? This gift is a matter of giving and receiving. It takes both sides. If I have a gift for you, but you are not willing to receive it, what can I do? I am helpless. God is happy to give us the kingdom, but are we ready to receive the kingdom? It is like salvation—God is happy to give His salvation to people as a free gift, but so many worldly people have not received His salvation. Why? It is because they are not willing to receive it. God is ready to give, but they will not receive it. Are you willing to receive the kingdom? God is ready to give the kingdom, and we must be willing and ready to receive it. We all must say, "Hallelujah! Thank You for the kingdom, Lord. I am so willing to receive it."

SEEKING ONLY THE KINGDOM

If we are willing to receive the kingdom, Luke gives us another verse: "Jesus said to him, No one who puts his hand on the plow and looks behind is fit for the kingdom of God" (9:62). If we put our hand on the plow, taking the kingdom, and look back, we are not fit for the kingdom. If we are willing to take the kingdom, we must go on. We must not look back. We should not seek the same things the worldly people are seeking. We should not be concerned with what we eat, what we drink, and so many other things. Rather, we must seek the kingdom of God, and God will add these things to us. If we seek the kingdom of God, surely God will give us the kingdom plus all our needs.

Do not consider that it is such a high and difficult thing to receive the kingdom. Because it is something of God's promise and free gift, it is not that difficult to receive. To give us the kingdom is God's good pleasure. He is happy to give us the kingdom. The only need is that we would be willing to receive the kingdom. If we are willing to receive the kingdom, we should forget about all the other things. God will take care of what we need—what we eat and what we drink. We should take no thought about those things. God will take care of them.

THE WAY TO ENTER INTO THE KINGDOM

I love what Peter says concerning the kingdom. In such a sweet, dear, and precious way Peter tells us how we can enter into the kingdom. Second Peter 1:1 and 3 say, "Simon Peter, a slave and apostle of Jesus Christ, to those who have been allotted faith equally precious as ours in the righteousness of our God and Savior, Jesus Christ...Seeing that His divine power has granted to us all things which relate to life and godliness, through the full knowledge of Him who has called us by His own glory and virtue." Here Peter says that we have all received a precious faith. Do not think that we can have faith out of ourselves. We cannot have faith. The precious faith is not something that originated from within us; it was given by God. We receive the precious faith from God. Then Peter says that God's divine power has granted to us all things which relate to life and godliness. How marvelous that God has given to us all things which relate to life and godliness! If we have the Lord Jesus within us as a seed, we have all the things which relate to life and godliness. As such a seed within us, the Lord Jesus is all-inclusive. Do not forget that the seed of a little plant is all-inclusive. A carnation seed is all-inclusive. Everything of the carnation plant is included in the seed. The root, the stem, the branches, the leaves, the blossom, the color, the substance, and the shape

are all included within the seed. Even all the beauty of the carnation life is included within the seed. Once the seed is sown into the earth, everything related to its life is sown there. Today the Lord Jesus is within us as the seed. Within that seed are all the things which relate to life within and godliness without.

Partakers of the Divine Nature

Verse 4 goes on to say, "Through which He has granted to us precious and exceedingly great promises that through these you might become partakers of the divine nature, having escaped the corruption which is in the world by lust." God has not only given all things which relate to life and godliness, but He has also granted to us the precious and exceedingly great promises that through these we might become partakers of the divine nature. In verse 1 we have received faith; in verse 3 we have received all things which relate to life and godliness; in verse 4 we have received the precious and exceedingly great promises that through these we can be partakers of the divine nature. How marvelous are these items!

Developing the Life Seed

What then shall we do? Only one thing—let Him grow! But we must realize that to let Him grow needs our cooperation. Therefore, verse 5 goes on to say, "For this very reason also, adding all diligence, supply bountifully in your faith virtue; and in virtue, knowledge." We have received the precious faith, but we need to develop many things by cooperating with His life within us. We need to develop the first thing and then the second thing and then the third thing and then the fourth thing. Again and again we must develop something. How can we develop something? We must learn all the time to open ourselves to the Lord. When we call on His name, "O Lord Jesus," we open ourselves to Him. Then we need to pray-read the Word and have some contact with the Lord, and go along with the Lord day by day. This will develop so many things within our being.

First, a little seed develops the root. Then it develops the stem and later the branches. The branches develop the leaves, and afterward come the blossoms. We do have faith within as the seed, and now we just need to open ourselves. We need to pray-read His Word and to love the Lord and take Him in. If day by day we will follow Him, go along with Him, and obey His inward leading,

something will be developed within us. Something will grow within us. This is the growth in life. At the very end of his Epistle, Peter says, "Grow in the grace" (2 Pet. 3:18). What does this mean? This means to develop the very seed that has been sown into us.

Growth in Life

On the one hand, I advise you and encourage you and charge you to seek after the kingdom. But on the other hand, I want to share with you that the wonderful way for you to enter into the kingdom is by developing all the items within you step by step (1:5-11). By this kind of development Peter says that we will have a rich entrance into the eternal kingdom of Christ. The way to enter into the kingdom is to grow in life. I like this term, *the entrance...richly and bountifully*. This means a rich entrance into the eternal kingdom. It is not that we can simply walk into the kingdom. We must grow and develop into the kingdom. The secret of entering into the kingdom is simply to grow in life. The seed of life is already within us. We simply must develop something with this life seed. We all have a wonderful life seed within us. But we need to grow and develop something with this seed. We enter the kingdom day by day by the growth of the inner life.

Do not consider that you can pray and fast for three days and nights and that will enable you to enter into the kingdom. No, that is not the divine economy. That is not the proper way. The proper way is that since the day you believed in the Lord Jesus, you received a little seed sown into you. Actually, there is no need for you to grow so fast. Just be happy with the Lord and thank Him. Go to the Lord and thank and praise Him. Open yourself to the Lord. Thank the Lord that He has sown Himself into you and that He is growing and spreading within you. The way of the Lord is the way of life, and the way of life is so simple. If you sow a carnation seed into the ground, you do not need to pray and fast. You simply need to sow the seed properly and then go home and rest. Occasionally, you need to come and water the seed. It will grow without your effort. To enter into the kingdom we simply need to grow in life and grow in grace.

HASTENING THE LORD'S COMING

Now let us read 2 Peter 3:11-12: "Since all these things are to be thus dissolved, what kind of persons ought you to be in holy manner of life and

godliness, expecting and hastening the coming of the day of God, on account of which the heavens, being on fire, will be dissolved, and the elements, burning with intense heat, are to be melted away?" The more we seek after the kingdom by growing in life, the more we hasten the coming of the day of the Lord. Surely the speed of His coming depends upon the speed of our growth; it depends upon our seeking. If we do not seek and we do not grow, His coming is delayed. We may pray for the Lord to come quickly, but He may say to us, "Grow quickly." There is no problem from His side; the problem is on our side. Surely the Lord Jesus would be happy if we would grow quickly. He is ready, but we are not ready. Where among all the Christians today can you see the growth in life? You can find mission work, church organization, speaking in tongues, and Bible teachings. You can find people seeking power, miracles, and healing, but where is the growth in life? Some Christians who have been saved for twenty years have not changed any at all; they have no growth in life.

May the Lord be gracious to grant us the growth in life for His coming back. Our growth in life will speed His coming back. How quickly He comes back depends on our growth. How can we hasten His coming? By being godly and having the reality of godliness. The proper godliness is just the development of the inner life. The more we develop something in our inner life, the more we are godly. The more godliness we can express, the more we will hasten the Lord's coming.

THE CHURCH BEING FOR THE KINGDOM

The Lord's eternal purpose is to have a kingdom. However, His enemy, Satan, knows this. Satan does everything he can to damage whatever is for the kingdom. The church is not for the church but for the kingdom. Therefore, Satan does his best to destroy and ruin and corrupt the church. First, he brings confusion into the church by putting in the tares. Then he changes the nature of the church by causing it to become a great tree, being mixed with the world. Furthermore, he hides much leaven in the church life to corrupt it. Because of this, the Lord Jesus comes in to call out the overcomers. The overcomers are simply those who overcome the confusion of the tares, the worldliness of the great tree, and all the corruption of the leaven. They overcome everything in order to have a proper church life. The recovery of the church life today is for the kingdom. Satan knows that God's way to have the

kingdom is through the church, so he does his best to damage the church. We must overcome all the damage of Satan.

THE LORD'S WISDOM

Here we see the Lord's wisdom. The Lord knows that some of His dear children who have really been saved will not be faithful to Him and will not cooperate with Him. Therefore, He holds forth a section of His kingdom as a kind of a reward and prize to encourage them to seek Him in a desperate way. He urges them to seek the kingdom. Those who are faithful and diligent will participate in the manifestation of the kingdom, but those who are not faithful and not cooperative will lose something and will suffer some punishment. The Lord will make the heavenly part of the millennium a prize and reward to all His faithful and overcoming ones. The hope of the reward to all the faithful ones is a strong encouragement to seek the kingdom. Today we may have salvation, but we do not yet have the prize and the reward. Whether we will receive a reward is up to us. May the Lord have mercy upon all of us that we would seek the kingdom in a desperate way!