

## The Kingdom of God

*From the Gospel: St. Matthew vi. 24.*

*24 No man can serve two masters: for either he will hate the one, and love the other; or else he will hold to the one, and despise the other. Ye cannot serve God and mammon. 25 Therefore I say unto you, Take no thought for your life, what ye shall eat, or what ye shall drink; nor yet for your body, what ye shall put on. Is not the life more than meat, and the body than raiment? 26 Behold the fowls of the air: for they sow not, neither do they reap, nor gather into barns; yet your heavenly Father feedeth them. Are ye not much better than they? 27 Which of you by taking thought can add one cubit unto his stature? 28 And why take ye thought for raiment? Consider the lilies of the field, how they grow; they toil not, neither do they spin: 29 And yet I say unto you, That even Solomon in all his glory was not arrayed like one of these. 30 Wherefore, if God so clothe the grass of the field, which to day is, and to morrow is cast into the oven, shall he not much more clothe you, O ye of little faith? 31 Therefore take no thought, saying, What shall we eat? or, What shall we drink? or, Wherewithal shall we be clothed? 32 (For after all these things do the Gentiles seek:) for your heavenly Father knoweth that ye have need of all these things. 33 But seek ye first the kingdom of God, and his righteousness; and all these things shall be added unto you. 34 Take therefore no thought for the morrow: for the morrow shall take thought for the things of itself. Sufficient unto the day is the evil thereof.*

What does it mean: *But seek ye first the kingdom of God, and his righteousness...*? Where are we to find this kingdom? This word *seek* is located elsewhere in this famous sermon of our Lord (Matthew 7):

*vs. 7 Ask, and it shall be given you; seek, and ye shall find; knock, and it shall be opened unto you: 8 For every one that asketh receiveth; and he that seeketh findeth; and to him that knocketh it shall be opened.*

The impression here is of a search that is neither lazy nor passive. In the Greek, the meaning is: “keep asking, keep seeking, keep knocking...”.

It is obvious, of course, that this cannot be a search for a visible kingdom. The reigning King can nowhere be found upon earth in obvious command of His realm.

We begin to find more evidences of Christ’s intent in these words when we look elsewhere in Scripture. As He neared the end of His earthly mission, His impatient enemies pressed Him for information on His plans (Luke 17):

*20 And when he was demanded of the Pharisees, when the kingdom of God should come, he answered them and said, The kingdom of God cometh not with observation: 21 Neither shall they say, Lo here! or, lo there! for, behold, the kingdom of God is within you.*

For those without eyes of faith, there could be no kingdom but that which could be established in visible power and authority, in defiance of all other dominions, and in that day, especially the hated Roman Empire. But for those who heard our Lord’s heartbeat in these teachings, it became obvious that He was announcing the grand opening of a marvelous concept in the very earliest stages of its development. A kingdom was surely in the very process of inauguration, because the King Himself had finally arrived on the scene.

One is reminded of Lewis's *The Lion, The Witch, and The Wardrobe*, and an amazing conversation between the Pevensie children and "Mr. Beaver" about the wondrous, mysterious figure of Aslan the Lion:

"Who is Aslan?" asked Susan.

"Aslan?" said Mr. Beaver, "Why don't you know? He's the King. He's the Lord of the whole wood, but not often here, you understand. Never in my time or my father's time. But word has reached us that he has come back..."

An "old rhyme" is then quoted by the beaver:

"Wrong will be right, when Aslan comes in sight,  
At the sound of his roar, sorrows will be no more,  
When he bares his teeth, winter meets its death  
And when he shakes his mane, we shall have spring again."

Lewis, of course, paints a picture of Christ's kingdom, a domain so broad in its scope and magnificence that its first principles can only begin to be laid down for its subjects, who will learn them through the perfection of practice. Until the King, at His chosen moment, assumes His throne in regal and imperial splendor, His reign will slowly, inexorably spread throughout the earth, encompassing all nations and peoples, so that at that very moment of His triumphal return, that which had been utterly invisible to physical eyes will now be clearly manifest. *The creation waits in eager expectation for the sons of God to be revealed* shouts Romans 8:19 (NIV). This process has been underway now for nearly two millennia.

In this present day, I am told to *seek* the kingdom. But where will I find it? Although I believe by faith that it exists, and is in the process of formation, I am severely challenged when I look around me. I turn first to the culture, wherein the kingdom once knew a high degree of honor and respect. Don't the great cathedrals attest to this, whose spires still rise over the countless cities and towns of what once was called Christendom? The love and devotion and community involvement that led to the construction of these irreplaceable structures tell a clear story. But they remain nothing but tokens of a forgotten past as they sink into disrepair. Nowhere any longer in the culture am I offered any clues for my desperate search.

Then I will look, instead, to the church. Surely here I will find satisfaction, for I know that believers are the true citizens of the new order: *ye are an holy nation...* said St. Peter (1 Pe. 2:9a). I do not doubt these words. But nevertheless I find division, disarray, disorder. If the inhabitants of Christ's kingdom are identifiable through some common, unmistakable singularity, I must battle to see it through a whole host of obscuring, human factors. In the face of all of this negative evidence, my faith falters.

Does this describe your Christian pilgrimage? It does mine. But it also leads me to a practical, if daunting conclusion. *I must be involved in building the very kingdom which I seek.* Allow me to challenge us here.

Certain Old Testament passages come to mind. In the 6th century B.C., a remnant of Jews returned from Babylonian captivity to the Promised Land. The exile of the nation, its utter destruction as a consequence of its sins against Jehovah, had been prophesied through dire warnings for centuries. But now a tiny remnant of the faithful, themselves “seeking the kingdom of God”, made its way back to a scene of devastation: Jerusalem, reduced to heaps of stones, the great temple, utterly demolished, towns and cities leveled. And although the work of reconstruction was begun, many of the returnees lapsed into preoccupation with their own lives and agendas. The prophet Haggai spoke to this condition:

*1:2 “Thus speaks the Lord of hosts, saying: ‘This people says, “The time has not come, the time that the Lord’s house should be built.”’” 3 Then the word of the Lord came by Haggai the prophet, saying, 4 “Is it time for you yourselves to dwell in your paneled houses, and this temple[a] to lie in ruins?” 5 Now therefore, thus says the Lord of hosts: “Consider your ways!... 9 “You looked for much, but indeed it came to little; and when you brought it home, I blew it away. Why?” says the Lord of hosts. “Because of My house that is in ruins, while every one of you runs to his own house... 14 So the Lord stirred up the spirit of [the leaders] and the spirit of all the remnant of the people; and they came and worked on the house of the Lord of hosts, their God... (NKJV)*

The reasons for their abandonment of their purpose and call were probably multiple. The project may well have seemed so discouragingly huge that they gave up hope of completing it. Instead, they returned to the predictable: building their own homes, establishing their own estates, perhaps hoping that someone else would take up the slack in fulfilling the mission to rebuild that which had been destroyed. Yes, they were selfish. What else can we call it? Their faith in God took them only so far, until they received the prophet’s upbraiding message, and acted upon it.

Other verses from the prophets also come to mind, ones that have continued to burn in my heart. Amos, who was only a shepherd, spoke to his people during an earlier age prior to both the Assyrian and Babylonian deportations. In addressing them, he referred to the nation by the names of its patriarchs Joseph and Jacob. After listing a series of woes that would be the direct consequence of their indifference to God’s voice, he uttered these poignant, and unforgettable words: *Woe to you who are at ease in Zion, ... but are not grieved for the affliction of Joseph.* (6:1, 6b, NKJV) When God threatened judgment, Amos pleaded with Him: *“O Lord God, forgive, I pray! Oh, that Jacob may stand, For he is small!”* Though God was willing to show mercy, the prophet’s words were wasted on a nation that was consumed in self-indulgence.

Am I “grieving for the affliction of Joseph”, the church of God, the kingdom of Christ, or am I indeed “at ease in Zion”, mildly concerned, somewhat moved, but not sufficiently enough so as to seek God and ask what sacrifice He might yet require of me?

*Oh, that Jacob may stand, For he is small!* He is small, indeed, so small that as I seek him, I am hard put to find him.

So as I *seek first the kingdom of God, and his righteousness...*, I have concluded that I must be involved in building the very kingdom that I seek: *So the Lord stirred up the spirit of [the leaders] and the spirit of all the remnant of the people; and they came and worked on the house of the Lord of hosts, their God...* What does this mean to you and to me? How does it work itself out in the most practical of terms? These are questions you must answer for yourself, and so must I.

A great, great deal depends upon whether you and I are successful in doing so.

*In the Name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost. Amen.*