

The Kingdom of God

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The Genesis Of Jesus the New King Matthew 1 & 2

Do you have any idea what the Kingdom of God would look like?

"My kingdom is not of this world." These are the words of the Lord Jesus Christ as recorded in John 18:36-37. Standing before Pontius Pilate, challenged by that Roman governor as to whether or not He was the king, His answer was: "You said it. I am a king, but my kingdom is not of this world." During the studies in this series we shall be focusing our attention upon the Kingdom of God, the whole idea of which is grounded in the very nature of man.

When we speak about the Kingdom of God we remember that when man was created he was to have dominion over the natural creation, over all the natural world. Man was to have dominion over the animals of the natural world. The very idea of "having dominion over" brings this word into our consciousness: "king." He is the dominant one: the one who has dominion is the king; and the word "dominion" refers to that area, that sphere, over which or in which he reigns or controls. Put those two words together - king's dominion - then leave out the other letters and underscore king dom and we have the "kingdom", the origin of this word. It refers to that area over which the king rules.

Looking at man a little more we will remember that man was created in the image of God. He was to exercise dominion over the natural world, using all his faculties to dominate the natural world and bring it into subjection. But man himself was to be under the law of God. He was to exercise authority over the natural world as an obedient servant of God. Apparently the world was so made that adequate living in this world is possible only when living is conducted under control. All around us in this world are all manner of elements - good and bad, vital and fatal. There are things good for food, and there are things that would poison: and they are all mixed together. Every human being, every living creature, must select in the environment those things that are useful and needful for his own being in order to live. Man, having control over all things, was to select such things as would be useful to him.

Man's individual attempt to live his life in this world as he saw fit has been proven to be inadequate. We shall see as we go along, that being left to himself has resulted in man living in confusion, in conflict, in contention and in violence. As each man has sought to control all things in which he was interested, there came times when he wanted something someone else had. When two persons want the same thing there is the state of conflict and of contention, and finally of violence in which one seeks to overcome the other.

This is the way it has happened with man. Since man, in his control of himself and of the universe, has not been able to work things out adequately, God, in mercy and in grace, has offered to man an alternative to man's own efforts, which is called the Kingdom of God. This is a way of identifying and of referring to living in such relationship with God that He takes control. God dominates and leads. Man is responsible, but now God leads through man in the direction He wants man to go. This relationship with God, which we call "the Kingdom of God", was offered to man as a free gift which needed only to be received to become operative. Almighty God wants to do this for man. We shall learn as we go along that it will only be operative in those who willingly receive it. But in order to willingly receive it they must know about it.

God has revealed His plan and purpose in certain promises. The Word of God, which contains these promises, is the revelation of the Kingdom of God, which we will say again is a situation in which a man surrenders to God to serve Him through Christ. Christ served God perfectly and so, when an individual believes in the Lord Jesus Christ and accepts Him as Savior and Lord, the Lord comes to dwell in him. Then, by activating His will in the man, Christ leads the man into the will of God. This actually means into the Kingdom of God. When we consider that man was created to have dominion, to have control and to make his own selection and chart his course, then we can speak of man as a king. In the relationship believers have with God through Christ Jesus, we read in the Scriptures that He has made us to be kings and priests unto God. But the idea of man being a king over that which is under him is according to the revelation God has given in the plan of God.

In this context we would say that Jesus Christ is "the King of Kings." He is the Lord of all. Jesus Christ perfectly obeyed His Father and He achieved this in the Father's plan that He should be the King of Kings and Lord of all. Christ activates the Kingdom of God on earth among men through His believers. In trying to understand the Kingdom of God it is very important to keep one aspect in mind; I quoted it at the beginning of this meditation: "My kingdom is not of this world." We shall learn as we go along that this Kingdom of God in Christ Jesus is not the same as the natural kingdoms around us. The real nature of the Kingdom of God is revealed in the Scriptures. The Scriptures show about the Person of the King, the conduct of the citizen in the Kingdom, and the contrast of this arrangement, this Kingdom of God, with the kingdoms of men.

Our study will be largely concerning the Kingdom as revealed in the Gospel of Matthew. The truth about the birth of the King is revealed in Matthew chapters 1 and 2, Luke chapters 1 and 2 and also in Paul's comment in Philippians 2:6-13. Our study will explore the revelation largely as it is in Matthew. Chapters 1 and 2 comprise all that Matthew tells about the birth of the King. A quick glance at these chapters in Matthew will show that this Scripture includes first, His genealogy, found in chapter 1, verses 1 to 17; second, His birth in chapter 1, verses 18 to 25; and third, His childhood in chapter 2 with the coming of the wise men in verses 1 to 12, the flight to Egypt to evade Herod in verses 13 to 15, and the return to Nazareth in Galilee, in verses 16 to 23.

Based upon this account in these first two chapters of Matthew we can see several facts. First, Jesus of Nazareth was legally heir to the throne. He was a descendant of David, and, His public status - His personal status in the society - was that of being in the family of Joseph, who was a direct flesh descendant of David in the line of royalty. Thus He was entitled to the throne. At times some students will point out that a curse had been placed upon that family back in the days of Jeconiah (Jeremiah 22:30). in which it was said that no one of that flesh would ever sit on the throne. When we have in mind that Jesus of Nazareth, because He was virgin born, did not really have in Him any flesh relationship with Joseph, we can see that the curse that was upon Joseph was not upon Jesus of Nazareth. But He was legally heir to the throne and Herod, the acting king, did not deny this claim.

Herod had been made king by the Roman government, and was a sort of puppet. He knew perfectly well he was not authorized to be king. He was not a flesh descendant of David, so he was sitting on a throne that really did not belong to him. When Herod heard that some had come to see the One who was born King of the Jews, he was disturbed. He wanted to know who this was, because whoever this was might even be a pretender to the throne.

In any case, Herod did not dispute the claim that was made about Jesus of Nazareth, that He was legally heir to the throne. In the second place, He was personally the incarnate Son of God. His pre-existence is established elsewhere in the New Testament, and in the Bible as a whole. The Son of God

actually had been with the Father before the world began; He was the Lamb slain before the foundation of the world. Thus He was existing with the Father before He ever came here, and His coming into this world was by way of the virgin birth.

The record in the book of Matthew does not leave anything to be questioned about the manner of His birth. It is true there are people today who do not believe this. We are living in a time when men who count themselves honorable men will openly and blatantly admit that they do not believe in the virgin birth, and at the same time they will claim that they believe in Jesus of Nazareth. With that kind of confusion in mind one cannot ever come to understand anything. I have discussed this fully in a pamphlet called "The Virgin Birth"; and I would be glad to send it to anyone who would ask for it.

Jesus of Nazareth was personally the incarnate Son of God; the fact that He was virgin born indicated that He was not of the seed of Adam. His coming was also announced by angels. An angel told Joseph that Mary would have a child. Before that, as Luke tells us, an angel had told Mary that she would have a child. When He was born angels were there to announce His birth.

Christ came as the answer to the need of the whole world. The wise men came asking "Where is He that is born King of the Jews? For we have seen His star in the east and we have come to worship Him." Prophecy in the Old Testament brings out everything that has a bearing on the future of Israel. There was the promise Someone would come, who would lead them out of their bondage and set them free; He was to be called the Messiah, and He would be both a Servant of God and the King of Kings. The Scriptures reveal this was Jesus of Nazareth, and here in these first chapters this is implied.

The Son of God incarnate as Jesus of Nazareth limited Himself to human situations. He did not display, nor did He exercise, supernatural strength. He was born in this world as a babe, and He was brought up in the home of those parents as a child. He was sheltered by Mary and Joseph and taken care of by them. It is astonishing that the Son of God as Jesus of Nazareth came into this world and submitted Himself to the circumstances that you and I live under. His life was lived in a predicted pattern: it had been foretold in the Old Testament that He was coming. When He came He was identified as the One who fulfilled the Old Testament prophecy, as the Messiah. The writer of this Gospel of Matthew and other writers in the New Testament point out that Jesus of Nazareth was the fulfillment of Old Testament prophecy.

Everything true about the King will be true about the Kingdom of God. He was under control; and when laid in a manger, He was personally helpless. When He was carried down into Egypt He had nothing to say about it - that's where Joseph and Mary took Him. When they brought Him back from Egypt, He again had nothing to say about it - that's where they brought Him. All the way through He is cared for by others. It is never a sign of weakness when a wise, good and capable man follows rules, and lives his life in wisdom so far as this world is concerned.

When he exercises good judgment in order to accomplish things, this is not a sign of weakness on the part of the man. The fact that the Lord Jesus Christ was born into a situation where there was control over His life is nothing new. I am saying this because we need to recognize that living in the Kingdom of God will mean that we will be under control, directed in everything that affects us.

We can be thankful that we have this plain, straight-forward story in the first two chapters of Matthew. Some great truths are clearly indicated here. There is first of all, the significance of the Old Testament Scriptures. This is how anyone can know who Christ is. If a person wants to find out about Jesus of Nazareth, he needs to know the Old Testament Scriptures. "This is He of whom Moses and the prophets did speak." Christ is the fulfillment of the promises in the Old Testament. This encourages study of the Old Testament to find out what God's plan was when He sent the Messiah into this world

to seek and to save the lost: Christ was to give Himself a ransom for many that He might set free those who put their trust in Him. All these things were promised in the Old Testament Scriptures.

A great truth revealed in these chapters is the function of angels. Angels really exist, and they really are messengers; the message they bring from God is really true. In other words, the living God at times uses angels to bring His message to men and this is what He did here.

Another great truth revealed here is the Virgin Birth. The whole world has heard about Jesus Christ: but the record of how He was born is found in the Gospel of Matthew and the Gospel of Luke, and nowhere else is anything said about how Jesus of Nazareth was born. A person may say, "I just can't see how the Virgin Birth can be true." I can understand very well why it is that people cannot think it is true. People think as human beings, but this is not about a human being: this is God coming into this world. Someone may say, "I just don't see how it was possible." This reminds me of what I have said many times to my students: "That means that you could sit right beside Mary, because when Gabriel told Mary that she would have a child before she ever lived with her husband, she said, 'How can these things be? How is it possible since I know not a man?' Gabriel answered her: 'With God, nothing is impossible.' Humbly and simply let me say that if you have any trouble about the Virgin Birth, don't ever let go of this one clue: 'With God nothing is impossible.' "

You may think this doctrine is not important, but it is important. Among other things, if you are ever going to be born again it will be by the direct act of God. Have you heard about the new birth? Have you heard about being born again? Being born again is an actual, real event; but no human being has anything to do with it. Human beings are used to teach the Word of God and to give their witness and testimony, but being born again is an act of God. "Not by might nor by power but by my Spirit." Not by flesh nor by the will of flesh but of God. Not by man nor by the will of man but of God. This is very, very important; because it enables you to believe that God can actually have you born again as you are; He can make you over and can make you new.

There is another truth in this passage I want to share with you; I will not be able to deal with it fully, but I do want to bring it to your mind: the coming of Christ was apparently known to the pagans. There was something about His coming that they could feel; it had been intimated to them. "We have seen His star in the East and have come to worship Him." I don't know how to explain that to you but the record is that they came, and that they came to the right place.

Perhaps we should note something else: the resistance of the ruling powers. This was true then, and it is true right on down to the present time. Not only did the Roman governor resist, but even the Jewish leaders, the temple authorities, resisted on every side. Ruling powers want to retain the status quo; they do not want anything to interrupt or upset the situation as it is, in which they have their authority.

Several other truths can be seen in this portion of Scripture. A very important truth for us all is the providence of God. God arranged for things. God's hand was behind the scene, setting things in order to happen in His own way. He set up one thing after another in such a way that events occurred in the life of Jesus of Nazareth that were in His will. This leads to another blessed truth: the guidance of God. We have already noted how He guided by angels and by dreams. He came to Joseph in a dream and revealed certain things to him. It seems that the revelation by angels and by dreams came to willing persons, who could and would be led. There is nothing in the Bible to indicate that God is going to deal with an unwilling person. No doubt He can deal with a person who is on the wrong road or who is going in the wrong direction, but there is no evidence in Scripture that He will ever deal with an unwilling person to lead that one into His will. Finally, let us note again the important truth of the submission of Christ to human situations. Once you see this you will be helped to expect that even when you become a follower

of the Lord so that you want to walk with Him and be in His Kingdom, you may do this by submitting yourself to and yielding to the human situation. You may not need to "kick against the pricks" so far as this world is concerned. You may yield yourself just as Jesus of Nazareth did when He was laid in a manger, carried into Egypt and carried back again. As He was taken care of, so you, as a believer, will be taken here and there, because you have yielded to the human situation in which you are; so you will be taken care of. We can expect much blessing as we study this whole line of truth, and we look forward to other studies in which we shall devote our time and attention to the thought of the Kingdom of God.

Get Ready for the New Kingdom

Matthew 3 & 4

Do you have a clear idea as to what sort of preparation a person should make if he were looking forward to living in the Kingdom of God?

The topic "Get Ready for the New Kingdom" is based on Matthew 3 & 4. The term "new Kingdom" implies there was an "old Kingdom", and this is true in a sense; but it should be remembered that the "new Kingdom" is not the same kind as the "old Kingdom." In Paul's writings he speaks of the "old man" being the "natural man" which is the state of any person born into this world of human parents. Then he speaks of the "new man" which is the state of any person who has been born again of the grace of God and the will of God by the Word of God. Just as this distinction is recognized between the new man in Paul's writing and the old man, so we can speak of the "new Kingdom" as over against the "old Kingdom."

There are actually just two kinds of kingdoms: the natural kingdom and the Spiritual Kingdom. There is the kingdom of man within the scope of man's own understanding and strength, and there is the Kingdom of God. We have recalled that when man was created he was to "have dominion over": he was to bring the natural world into subjection, and rule over it as king. Man was to be dominant. Then as a matter of fact in sin man became a servant. He became a slave to sin and to his desires, and so he fell under bondage to Satan. In salvation this man in bondage - this sinful man - is delivered. He is set free. Although it is true that he becomes now a bondsman of Christ, he is actually free from all others. The Bible tells us that by accepting the Lordship of Christ the believer is actually a king and a priest unto God. And that, in general, is the significance of being in the Kingdom of God. It is when I no longer do what I want to do, and I no longer do what any other creature wants to have done; I am now yielded to do the will of God. For "Christ in you the hope of glory" and "God working in you to will and to do of His good pleasure" is God's way of delivering us from sin, and bringing us into the blessedness that is in God.

Now let us face this question: can any preparation be made for a natural person to become spiritual? As we begin thinking we should remember certain facts: entering the Kingdom of God is not a matter of achieving anything. One doesn't work up to it, as if he were to accomplish something. Becoming spiritual is a matter of receiving from God something He wants to give. We could express it this way: it is not a matter of doing good or of doing enough: it is letting God do, by yielding to the living God who works in the heart to will and to do of His good pleasure. What then, if anything, can be done to help the coming of the Lord into the heart? We remember the words of Isaiah when he said in the 40th chapter: "Make straight in the desert a highway for our God." How can this be done? John the Baptist did this in classic fashion. It is done simply by challenging people to repent. "Straighten out your ways," Isaiah says. "The voice of him that crieth in the wilderness, Prepare ye the way of the Lord, make straight in the desert a

highway for our God" (Isaiah 40:3). In the New Testament we understand John the Baptist came in the spirit and power of Elijah, and he came preaching this very message, saying he was a voice crying in the wilderness." John the Baptist is always associated with this call to repentance. When Jesus of Nazareth began to preach He said, "Repent: for the kingdom of heaven is at hand" (Matthew 4:17).

What now does this mean from a practical point of view? What does "repent" amount to so far as the human being is concerned? Is there any practical way to understand what this would mean in preparing the way of the Lord? Let us think about it in this way: if a young woman were committed in her affections to a number of boy friends, can you understand that she would not be in a position to receive a proposal for marriage from any one of them? If one were to propose marriage to her at this time it would be expected that she would repudiate all others and give herself over to this one alone. Now if she were already involved with a number of others she could not really do this. This illustration may be rather difficult to follow, so let us consider something quite simple. If I wanted to have a garden in a plot of ground that is now full of weeds, can you see that I could not expect any beans? But couldn't that garden produce beans? Yes, if a simple thing is done: if I hoe out the weeds I could plant the beans and expect a crop. I remember seeing this principle actually demonstrated years ago in the case of a young child whose hands were full of toys with which he had been playing. Someone offered another toy to him: he looked from one hand to the other - both hands were full - and he even lifted up one foot to try and take the new toy! How much we are like that as adult human beings.

Do you realize that the average person's heart and mind are full? We could often admit quite sadly they are full of nothing worthwhile. All our time can be taken up, all our money can be spent, all our energies can be gone: we may be running around doing what isn't really worth anything. Of course all this is a way of wasting time. But what can a person do? If a person's heart were filled with consideration of the things of this world: business, pleasures, family, neighbors, government, can you see that such a person would not have energy to give time or thought to the matter of dealing with God? The soul who yearns for the spiritual must cut across all that, and look into the face of the Lord to receive what He is ready to give. A person cannot finish with the things of this world, and, then turn to God. The soul never gets done with the things of this world.

Let us go back to the garden again: if you want beans you must follow a simple process: hoe out the weeds and plant the beans. If that little boy wants to get that toy, and his hands are now full of other things, he must lay something down to get a free hand, and then he can take something new. That is exactly what John the Baptist was preaching in his day and time. When Jesus of Nazareth began His preaching He used this text, "Repent: for the kingdom of heaven is at hand" (Matthew 4:17). You have a chance to get something very important - something new and wonderful and vital; you can have it, but you will have to repent.

What does this word "repent" mean? The popular point of view probably would say it means I will be sorry for what I have done. Don't misunderstand what I am going to say: perhaps it is true that I should be sorry for what I did, because what I have done may be a "sorry" business. But that is not repentance. A person can be sorry and still do the same thing again. No, just being sorry for something I have done wrong is not enough to turn me away from doing it.

Someone may say, "I know what you mean by repent; I am supposed to promise that I will do better." No, that is not what I mean. Would you mind if I say to you New Year's resolutions are not worth very much? Promises to do better when you have made a mistake don't amount to very much. I realize you may want to turn away from evil and turn to the Lord. You may want to do it, I admit, but the promise to do better is really a very shallow deceit. If a young woman came to me and asked my

advise about marrying a man when it was known he had some real difficulty, I would say to her, "Don't you understand that because of the way this man lives you couldn't live with him?" She may then say to me, "Well, he promised he would do better." Regardless of who the man is or who the girl is, if I had any sense I would tell her, "Don't do it. Don't ever commit yourself to anybody on the basis of what he promises he will do tomorrow."

Let me tell you something: tomorrow a person will do as he does today, only that he will be a day older. What he promises will not make much difference - he may walk into it even backwards - but he will do tomorrow what he did today as long as he is as he is. That is just what happens over and over again. No, repenting does not mean to promise to do better because promises are cheap and of no value. Understanding of this spiritual action is gained by looking at the word itself: repent is to make a re-estimation of oneself. It is actually a re-judgment of self. We have heard people talk about "repenting of their sins"; that is poor English: it is an awkward construction, and it isn't true to fact. A person does not repent of his sins, he repents of himself! This is the very essence of repentance: to be able to see deep down in oneself and to say, "I am the man; it was my action and I am responsible." This is what repentance means. It is a re-judgment of oneself in which a person acknowledges himself as unfit.

Someone may ask, "When you say "unfit" are you referring to some standard?" Yes. You may say, "Standards are so variable and so relative, I would not know how to do it." But there is One who is not variable: i.e. God. He does not change. There is a standard that is absolutely fixed; and that is the law of God. If you want to know the law of God, read the Ten Commandments. In them is revealed what God requires of man, so far as his conduct is concerned. But what of the person who does not read the Bible, who perhaps cannot even read? Then it would be necessary to go to his conscience, because deep down in his own heart he shows the work of the law in his own conscience; "his own thoughts meanwhile accusing or excusing himself" (Romans 2:15).

When I look up and see the heavens above, and I look around and see the world all round about me, "the heavens declare the glory of God and the firmament showeth His handiwork" (Psalm 19:1). When I think of God I am aware that "whatsoever a man soweth, that shall he also reap" (Galatians 6:7). So I realize that there are consequences for every act and when all of this comes to my mind, it becomes clear to me that what I do has I am going to harvest. This is the very essence of the law of God. When I think about that, I am conscious of the fact that the evil things I have done will entail evil results, and when I am aware of that, I will be conscious of the fact that I am not acceptable to God.

We could take Job as an example. The description of Job in the Bible is that of a righteous man. He was the kind of man who worshipped God daily, and brought in sacrifices for his children; he even prayed for his children for deeds they might have done that were wrong. We cannot bring any indictment against Job, so far as his character was concerned, before the time of his great tragedy. Yet when we come to the end of the book, Job has this to say: "I have heard of thee by the hearing of the ear; but now mine eye seeth thee: wherefore I abhor myself, and repent in dust and ashes" (Job 42:5-6). This is what I am talking about: a judgment of oneself in the sight of God, when I realize I am just not fit. Isaiah is another example: "Woe is me! for I am undone; because I am a man of unclean lips, and I dwell in the midst of a people of unclean lips: for mine eyes have seen the King, the Lord of hosts" (Isaiah 6:5). In his vision Isaiah saw an angel take a coal off the altar and touch his lips; then he was told: "Thine iniquity is taken away, and thy sin purged" (Isaiah 6:7).

Paul had the same attitude as Job and Isaiah. Even when he was an apostle, Paul wrote, "For I know that in me (that is, in my flesh,) dwelleth no good thing" (Romans 7:18). These are illustrations of godly men who became conscious of themselves in the sight of God, and who judged themselves. Standing in

the sight of God, they were as men looking into a mirror, and what they saw convicted them that they were sinners in the sight of God.

When John the Baptist was telling people to repent, when he urged them to admit their own shortcomings, he was not proposing that be done as a substitute for the sacrifices. The Jewish people observed the ritual of bringing in animal sacrifices and shedding the blood, on the basis of which their sins were to be forgiven. John the Baptist did not discredit that. The people were to bring their sacrifices as usual; but what he was saying to them was when you participate in all those religious practices you must mean it. If you don't mean it from the bottom of your heart, it is no good, It will not count. You must judge yourself as you are, and since you are unfit, when you come into the presence of God, you must throw yourself on the mercy of God.

In chapters 3 and 4 we read more about getting ready for the new Kingdom, about the frame of mind a person needs to have, to be ready to receive the Kingdom of God. A believer must heed the instruction of the Bible: follow and listen through to the teaching of John the Baptist. In order to prepare the way of the Lord and to make His path straight a person must judge himself in the sight of God and acknowledge that he is not fit. A significant incident is recorded in Matthew 3:7-12. John the Baptist was a young preacher; he was only six months older than Jesus of Nazareth; and we know that Jesus of Nazareth was about thirty years of age when He began to preach (Luke 3:23), so that at the time we read this, John the Baptist was between thirty and thirty-one years of age. Yet at this time he was such a famous preacher all of Jerusalem went out to hear him.

"But when he saw many of the Pharisees and Sadducees come to his baptism, he said unto them, O generation of vipers, who hath warned you to flee from the wrath to come? Bring forth therefore fruits meet for repentance: and think not to say within yourselves, We have Abraham to our father: for I say unto you, that God is able of these stones to raise up children unto Abraham. And now also the axe is laid unto the root of the trees: therefore every tree bringeth not forth good fruit is hewn down, and cast into the fire"
(Matthew 3:7- 10).

This is the way he preached to them. John the Baptist saw these sophisticated Pharisees and Sadducees, and said in effect, "Who asked you to come here to worship God? Get yourselves right before God." He called them "snakes - venomous ones," and did not tone down his message at all because of their prominence. He told them to admit they were sinners regardless of their position. When he said "the axe is laid to the root of the trees" he meant his message was intended to cut right down to the very bone in this matter: he was getting right down to the "nitty gritty." What matters is the way I feel in my heart: "As a man thinketh in his heart so is he." If I am to have dealings with God I must be right in His sight.

Immediately after this is the record of another significant incident: Jesus of Nazareth came forward to be baptized of John. It will help to remember Jesus of Nazareth and John were second cousins: their mothers, Elizabeth and Mary, were cousins and close friends. I think these two men knew each other through the years of their childhood and youth. When Jesus of Nazareth came forward to be baptized of John, John hesitated. He shrank back from doing it. "John forbade him, saying, I have need to be baptized of thee, and comest thou to me?" John was calling the people to come that they should be baptized for repentance, to judge themselves as unworthy. John the Baptist knew this Jesus of Nazareth, and it is a great tribute to the manner of life Jesus of Nazareth must have lived that John the Baptist, a man who was filled with the Holy Spirit from his youth, saw no fault in Him. "I have need to be baptized of thee, and comest thou to me?" You will remember the Lord said to him: "Suffer it to be so

now: for thus it becometh us to fulfill all righteousness. Then he suffered him."

If you have ever had a question in your mind about the Godhead - God the Father, God the Son, and God the Holy Spirit, you should mark this passage in Matthew 3:16, 17: "And Jesus, when he was baptized, went up straightway out of the water: and, lo, the heavens were opened unto him, and he saw the Spirit of God descending like a dove, and lighting upon him: and lo a voice from heaven, saying, This is my beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased." All three Persons of the Godhead are active in those two verses.

In Chapter 4 is the remarkable story of the temptation of Jesus of Nazareth in the wilderness. It is helpful to contrast this event with the temptation of Adam and Eve in the Garden of Eden. When He was in the wilderness Jesus of Nazareth successfully resisted Satan by the use of Scripture. In this He set the example for all believers in Him that when temptation comes they should turn to the Word of God. Jesus of Nazareth rested Himself on the Word of God, and with the Word of God in His hand, so to speak, He overcame the devil. Thus, at the very outset of His public ministry, Jesus of Nazareth, the King of Kings, who was coming to show us the way to God in Himself, set forth this evidence that the Kingdom of God will be in conflict with the forces of darkness. Christ Jesus will be in conflict with Satan, but victory is assured for the Lord in the law of God according to the Word of God.

From that time Jesus began to preach "Repent: for the kingdom of heaven is at hand" (Matthew 4:17). This is exactly the same text John the Baptist used, telling all men everywhere "If you want to come into the presence of God to be blessed, if you want to have dealings with God, you must be sincere. You must judge yourself in the sight of God, and let the truth condemn you as you are: then when you come into the presence of God you will know that you are a sinner. You are personally not worth anything." That needs to be very clearly kept in mind because that will prepare you to receive the Kingdom of God when you know that you are not worth anything. When you know that you are not able to do anything, you can turn and put your faith and trust in the living Lord Jesus Christ with joy. He is able to save to the uttermost those who come unto God by Him. And He is the source of our confidence and our joy.

New People In The New Kingdom **Matthew 5, 6, & 7**

The story of Jesus Christ is the account of what God did through Jesus of Nazareth in order to save souls. The story begins with John the Baptist, a great preacher who came to prepare the way of the Lord. John's topic was: the baptism of repentance for the remission of sins. Jesus of Nazareth began His ministry by preaching and using the same theme. Now we turn to Matthew and note His famous Sermon on the Mount. Analyzing this message is difficult, if not impossible, because the sermon was not organized the way we ordinarily find that done. The material found here is best understood when it is taken as a conversational discussion of a number of aspects of living in the will of God, such as the believer would profit by knowing. Each aspect deals with a standard problem in the whole matter of living the life of faith.

In Matthew 5:1-12 we see the Lord's teaching concerning the attitude a believing person will have about himself. These are the famous Beatitudes. This is not a description of a manner of life that one should strive for, as if one should undertake to achieve this by his efforts; this is a description of the aspects of life which is the consequences of being in the Kingdom of God. In these verses we find no coercion. There is no urgency that anyone should seek such traits of character, but simply a clear statement of the blessedness which comes to those who already have these traits. Beginning in verse 3

are listed a series of those characteristics which are to be found in people who are walking in the will of God. These are they in the Kingdom of God: "Blessed are the poor in spirit: for theirs is the kingdom of heaven." The poor in spirit are those who consider themselves to be poor; poverty stricken in spiritual things. They have a low estimate of their spiritual state. These are the fortunate people.

"Blessed are they that mourn: for they shall be comforted" (Matthew 5:4). Those who mourn are those who realize on their part the loss or lack of desirable possibilities. They do not have what they could have had, or what they could have wanted; and they are not able to do what they ought to do. Many such shortcomings cause them to mourn. In the Kingdom of God comfort will be given to all such, regardless of their personal strength or achievement.

"Blessed are the meek: for they shall inherit the earth" (Matthew 5:5). The meek are people who will not retaliate when they are injured. "Blessed are they which do hunger and thirst after righteousness: for they shall be filled" (Matthew 5:6): these are they who desire above everything else to be right in God's sight. In each instance the characteristic was described, and then there the blessedness, the good fortune, was set forth. The expression "inherit the earth" is taken from the Old Testament, where it referred to the land of Canaan. Those who were meek in the sight of God, walking humbly in the sight of God, would inherit the land of Canaan - the earth. Today we would say they would inherit the promises of God.

"Blessed are the merciful: for they shall obtain mercy" (Matthew 5:7). The merciful are those who have compassion upon the ignorant, the unfortunate. "Blessed are the pure in heart: for they shall see God" (Matthew 5:8). Perhaps these could better be called "the purified ones," because nobody is pure in himself; but we can be made pure by the blood of Jesus Christ which cleanseth us from all sins. So blessed are the purified ones who have no self interest: they shall see God. "Blessed are the peacemakers: for they shall be called the children of God" (Matthew 5:9). The peacemakers are those who do what is necessary to remove the elements that trouble people. We do not make peace by saying "peace" - we make peace by removing what is disturbing and causing trouble. "Blessed are they which are persecuted for righteousness' sake: for theirs is the kingdom of heaven" (Matthew 5:10). "They which are persecuted for righteousness' sake" means those who are made to suffer because they witness to the truth, trying to do right in God's sight; because of that they encounter opposition and endure suffering from unbelieving people and they can count themselves fortunate. They are able actually to rejoice in the fact that they can live with God.

"Blessed are ye, when men shall revile you, and persecute you, and shall say all manner of evil against you falsely, for my sake. Rejoice, and be exceeding glad" (Matthew 5:11-12). Those who are persecuted because they witness to Jesus Christ can afford to rejoice because they are very fortunate: "for so persecuted they the prophets which were before you." In each of these statements Jesus of Nazareth set forth certain characteristics which belong to those who believe in the promises of God. These are by no means all, but they are truly typical characteristics of those who are in the Kingdom of God, walking in obedience to the will of God. It is always good to remember that John pointed out flesh and blood cannot enter into the Kingdom of God, but "ye must be born again."

The Beatitudes are wonderful. But there is no admonition to "go out and try to be like this" - there is no urging to seek these traits. The gardener does not have to do anything to make the rose pink or the peach ripe; these things happen from the inside out according to their nature. It is important to note that so far as these Beatitudes are concerned, all of the promises of blessing upon those who have these characteristics are found in the Old Testament. Most of the statements are taken just as they are from the book of Deuteronomy: there is nothing new in the Sermon on the Mount.

Matthew 5:13-16 presents two familiar statements wherein are set forth certain truths about the significance of the testimony of people who belong to God and who walk with Him. "Ye are the salt of the earth" (Matthew 5:13). Salt was a preservative for food; it was used not only to make food taste better, but in those days salt was used to keep food from spoiling. It had an acrid taste and was pungent in its affect. Jesus of Nazareth pointed out that if the salt loses its pungent, acrid function it has no value. Salt in itself has no other value as a food. Believers in the Lord Jesus Christ by being born again are members of the Kingdom of God in this world; in their actions they have a preserving effect wherever they are. As salt works with food these believers counteract the degenerative affects of sin in society.

"Ye are the light of the world" (Matthew 5:14). Whatsoever doth make manifest is light. Light shows the truth; and the presence of believers is like a light. So Jesus of Nazareth explained to these people "Let your light so shine." Obviously this is for people who are in the Kingdom of God. Such believers live in the presence of other people. Any person who believes in the Lord Jesus Christ and who is therefore a member of the Kingdom of God, lives on in this natural world. Here the Lord says to him: "Let your light so shine before men (before natural men), that they may see your good works, and glorify your Father which is in heaven" (Matthew 6:16). This does not urge anyone to become a light; but it urges one being a light to shine in the presence of others.

Jesus of Nazareth taught clearly about His attitude towards Scripture. "Think not that I am come to destroy the law, or the prophets: I am not come to destroy, but to fulfill" (Matthew 5:17). That means just what it says. He went on to say: "One jot or one tittle shall in no wise pass from the law, till all be fulfilled." That means, in our everyday language, that the dotting of an "i" or the crossing of a "t" will not be changed in the law, during the present age. Lip service, outward conformity to rules and patterns, will not do. The real inner meaning of the law must be recognized and practiced.

Jesus of Nazareth then made these final statements: "Whosoever therefore shall break one of these least commandments, and shall teach men so, he shall be called the least in the kingdom of heaven: but whosoever shall do and teach them, the same shall be called great in the kingdom of heaven. For I say unto you, That except your righteousness shall exceed the righteousness of the scribes and Pharisees, ye shall in no case enter into the kingdom of heaven" (Matthew 5:19-20). In the remainder of this chapter we will see a number of illustrations of how the law of God was to be understood, how it was to be observed; because the law of God was set forth in the Old Testament Scriptures, most clearly revealed in the Ten Commandments.

The commandment "Thou shalt not kill" is dealt with in Matthew 5:21-26 and the Lord points out it means more than just a matter of taking another person's life. Between human beings there is to be no prolonged disagreement, no despising anybody. This provides basis for "Whosoever hateth his brother is a murderer" (I John 3:16). Matthew 5:27-32 is a discussion of the meaning of "Thou shalt not commit adultery." In this passage it is plainly pointed out that it is not merely the physical act of adultery that is involved, but the very thought of it, the desire for it, is sin. Even if self control needs to be drastic, it is essential. Paul wrote: "And they that are Christ's have crucified the flesh with the affections and lusts" (Galatians 6:24). This is the idea. Let us remember this describes the living of a person who is in the Kingdom of God, but who is also still living in this physical body with all the motions of sin in its members. It would seem that thinking about adulterous practices is normal for this natural body, and is sinful in the sight of God.

The implications of the discussion in Matthew 5:33-37 are not so obvious, but they seem to point clearly to the third commandment: "Thou shalt not take the name of the Lord thy God in vain." Taking the name of the Lord thy God in vain was not so much a matter of what we commonly call profane

language; it was a matter of calling upon God as a witness to justify me when I am doing something that is not right in His sight. Jesus of Nazareth taught "Thou shalt not forswear thyself." "Forswearing" is taking the name of the Lord God to give the impression of veracity when I am actually lying, and this is not what I am to do.

In Matthew 5:38 the Lord then went on to discuss matters that are related to the inner meaning of the commandment "Thou shalt not covet." If someone compels you (by invoking the law of Moses) to go with them a mile, go with them two. In the law of Moses it was designated that if a man were working in a field a great distance from home, and night came; the danger of being robbed on the way home was such that he could go into any Israelite's home and ask for an escort for a mile. The law of Moses decreed that in consideration of his plight the believing man should go one mile with the person who asked for help. But the Lord said, "Go another one. Go two." Again, the law said that if a man was working in a field, and it came on toward night so that the weather turned cold, rather than suffer from exposure because of improper clothing, he should go into the home of any Israelite and ask for a coat. In giving the true meaning of this Jesus of Nazareth taught if any man asks you according to the law to give him a coat, you should give him an overcoat also. In other words, do more than you have to do.

Matthew 5:43-48 presents a discussion of what it means when the law says "Love thy neighbor." This again goes further than is ordinarily understood. Jesus of Nazareth points out that one is to have an attitude of good will toward everybody. God made all people (good and bad); He has given His Son to die for all, and He is willing to receive anyone who believes. God is no respecter of persons, and those who have in them the Spirit of the Lord Jesus Christ will treat all people with no respect of persons. There is a clue in this for those souls who have been born again, to whom this portion applies, when the Word; says "That you may be the children of your Father." A person does not act like a child of God by imitation: a person gets to be like a child of God when he lives and acts in the will of God. "Be ye therefore perfect," which is to say: be full grown, mature and fruit bearing in your faith.

In Chapters 6 and 7 of Matthew Jesus of Nazareth shows how people who belong to God and who are indwelt by the Holy Spirit of God act in devotional practices. The believing person will pray humbly, sincerely and in a genuine way (Matthew 6:1-15). In the matter of fasting the believing person will do it for the sake of what it means to his soul before God. Following that is a discussion of values in Matthew 6:19-23: "Lay not up for yourselves treasures upon earth . . . but lay up for yourselves treasures in heaven." The admonition is clearly stated: a man should put his values where they will be safe from corruption or theft; he should look towards Heaven and work to that end. After a discussion of the goals a believing person will have, in verses 24 to 34, the line of thought comes to this climax: "Seek ye first the kingdom of God," (serve God and seek Heaven) "and all these things shall be added unto you" (Matthew 6:33).

A number of particular points are emphasized in chapter 7. In the criticism of others, verses 1 to 5: "Judge not, that ye be not judged." Thus a man should not have an attitude of critical appraisal of other people, yet immediately following there is a sort of corrective emphasis: a man should evaluate others when it comes to being like them. "Neither cast ye your pearls before swine" (Matthew 7:6). A man would have to know who the swine are so he must notice and appraise people. If persons a believer is dealing with do not appreciate spiritual things, the wise thing would be not to try to show them.

A discussion of the importance of praying comes next, with the famous imperatives: "Ask, and it shall be given you; seek, and ye shall find; knock, and it shall be opened unto you" (Matthew 7:7). While men live in this world they may be trusting and believing in God but they are dealing in a world about which they know nothing. They find many things contrary to them: things about which they need to make

decisions. For that men need help. If a man will ask, seek, knock, he will find that the guidance given by Jesus of Nazareth about praying will be effectual.

Jesus of Nazareth summarized the guidance of the Old Testament Scriptures in what is commonly called "the Golden Rule," (which is not so much a rule to go by as a measure). If a man were to ask himself what would be the wise way to behave, this is the Word: "All things whatsoever ye would that men should do to you, do ye even so to them: for this is the law and the prophets" (Matthew 7:12).

In giving guidance Jesus of Nazareth gave a very sharp definition: "Enter ye in at the strait gate: for wide is the gate, and broad is the way, that leadeth to destruction, and many there be which go in thereat: because strait is the gate, and narrow is the way, which leadeth unto life, and few there be that find it" (Matthew 7:13-14). The Lord is simply teaching these people there is a right way to come to God. If a person belongs to God and looks to Him for guidance, having received from God the Holy Spirit, he will be inwardly moved to go the right way even though it is narrow and apparently confining, but he can recognize this is the way home.

Warnings about false prophets are plainly set forth: "By their fruits you shall know them" (Matthew 7:15-20). False prophets do exist and they are dangerous, but they can be avoided. There is also warning against false hopes: "Not every one that saith unto me, Lord, Lord, shall enter in to the kingdom of heaven; but he that doeth the will of my Father which is in heaven" (Matthew 7:21-23). The Lord is emphasizing that it will take more than talk to enable one to walk with the Lord.

This sermon on the Mount is concluded by His emphasis upon the importance of a solid foundation: "Whosoever heareth these sayings of mine, and doeth them, I will liken him unto a wise man" (doing the will of God means security and safety). "And every one that heareth these sayings of mine, and doeth them not, shall be likened unto a foolish man" (failing to do the will of God will mean loss and destruction) (Matthew 7:24-27). This way of living which is set forth in this portion had been predicted in the Old Testament; but it would be made possible for any man through Jesus Christ. This was the meaning of what John the Baptist said: "The Kingdom of Heaven is at hand. Repent and believe the Gospel." Jesus of Nazareth, using the same text, preached this same message.

The Power Of The New Kingdom Matthew 8 & 9

This study will be based on Matthew Chapters 8 and 9. The revelation that was set forth in Jesus Christ is a revelation of the will of God manifested here upon earth, in the person of Jesus of Nazareth. He was born of a woman and made in all points like as we are, yet without sin. He demonstrated in Himself the will of God. Jesus of Nazareth was the Master, Teacher and Demonstrator, who used the common current natural situations of this world to show what is meant by the grace of God and the promises of God.

"When he was come down from the mountain, great multitudes followed him. And, behold, there came a leper and worshiped him, saying, Lord, if you wilt, thou canst make me clean. And Jesus put forth his hand, and touched him, saying, I will; be thou clean. And immediately his leprosy was cleansed" (Matthew 8:1-3).

In this one incident there is shown the grace of God in that He would heal, and the power of God in that He could heal. It is done in such a way God will be given the glory. This is indicative of all that is done in the Kingdom of God here upon earth. It is by the power of God in the will of God. The moving

story of the servant of the centurion who was healed is recorded in Matthew 8:5-13. The centurion came to meet Jesus of Nazareth and told Him his servant was sick. Jesus of Nazareth said, "I will come and heal him." The centurion replied: "Lord, I am not worthy that thou shouldst come under my roof: but speak the word only, and my servant shall be healed." The centurion believed Jesus of Nazareth could heal simply by speaking the word; because He was the Lord. He said to the centurion: "Go thy way; and as thou has believed, so be it done unto thee." And it was. In Matthew 8:14-15 we read Peter's wife's mother was lying sick of a fever. When Jesus of Nazareth saw her there sick, He touched her; and immediately she was healed and arose and ministered to them. These instances are different in procedure. The leper felt he needed cleansing and believed Jesus of Nazareth could do it. We do not know what his servant thought but we do know the centurion believed Jesus of Nazareth could heal. And in the case of the mother of Peter's wife the Lord Himself exercised His power in His own will without being asked to do so. The account goes on to describe how many were healed: "When the even was come, they brought unto him many that were possessed with devils: and he cast out the spirits with his word, and healed all that were sick: that it might be fulfilled which was spoken by Isaiah the prophet, saying, Himself took our infirmities, and bare our sicknesses" (Matthew 8:16-17).

In Matthew 8:19-22 a very interesting incident is recorded, in which two men came and each offered to follow Jesus of Nazareth as Lord.

"And a certain scribe came, and said unto him, Master, I will follow thee whithersoever thou goest. And Jesus saith unto him, The foxes have holes, and the birds of the air have nests; but the Son of man hath not where to lay his head. And another of his disciples said unto him, Lord, suffer me first to go and bury my father. But Jesus said unto him, Follow me; and let the dead bury their dead" (Matthew 8:19-22).

Each one was dealt with separately: one is told he would never own anything if he followed Jesus of Nazareth; the other was told a direct call from the Lord takes precedence over everything else.

"And when he was entered into a ship, his disciples followed him. And, behold, there arose a great tempest in the sea, insomuch that the ship was covered with the waves: but he was asleep. And his disciples came to him, and awoke him, saying, Lord, save us: we perish. And he saith unto them, Why are ye fearful, O ye of little faith? Then he arose, and rebuked the winds and the sea; and there was a great calm. But the men marveled, saying, What manner of man is this, that even the winds and the sea obey him" (Matthew 8:23-27)!

In this incident Jesus of Nazareth was showing them how it was in His power to control the processes of nature. It is notable they had confidence in Him, And we can learn from this He can bring peace in a troubled situation by His Word.

"And when he was come to the other side into the country of the Gergesenes, there met him two possessed with devils, coming out of the tombs, exceeding fierce, so that no man might pass by that way. And, behold, they cried out, saying, What have we to do with thee, Jesus, thou Son of God? art thou come hither to torment us before the time" (Matthew 8:28-29)?

These were evidently outcasts from society and would probably be called mentally disturbed. Many today would say this was a case of psychological disturbance or aberration, but here it simply stated they were possessed with demons. We need to mark this point in our Bible: at a time when men did not recognize Jesus of Nazareth the demons (the devils) recognized Him not only as a man of power but as the Son of God: and they felt He would be the one who would judge them, and cast them out. They

asked permission to go into a herd of swine, and He gave it to them.

"And they that kept them fled, and went their ways into the city, and told every thing, and what was befallen to the possessed of the devils. And, behold, the whole city came out to meet Jesus: and when they saw him, they besought him that he would depart out of their coasts" (Matthew 8:33-34).

Here is a sad commentary on the stupid blindness of the human heart. The demons knew who He was, but these people asked Him to leave.

The first incident recorded in chapter 9 is another occasion of healing. But there is a new dimension, a new element here. The story tells of friends bringing a paralyzed man to the Lord Jesus Christ that he should be healed:

"And, behold, they brought to him a man sick of the palsy, lying on a bed: and Jesus seeing their faith said unto the sick of the palsy; Son, be of good cheer; thy sins be forgiven thee" (Matthew 9:2).

It is important to note that He saw the faith of those friends, and forgave the man they brought. The record does not tell us the man had any faith, nor does it tell us he had persuaded his friends to bring him. What the story tells us is that those friends brought the man, and when Jesus of Nazareth saw their faith (their, not his faith) He said: "Son, be of good cheer; thy sins be forgiven thee." This is the new element: the new dimension: the forgiveness of sin. That was not the reason they brought him: they brought him because he was sick. Jesus of Nazareth, seeing their faith, said, "Your sins are forgiven." That was more and different than what they came for.

"And behold, certain of the scribes said within themselves, This man blasphemeth. And Jesus knowing their thoughts said, Wherefore think ye evil in your hearts? For whether is easier, to say, Thy sins be forgiven thee; or to say, Arise, and walk? But that ye may know that the Son of man hath power on earth to forgive sins, (then saith he to the sick of the palsy,) Arise, take up thy bed, and go unto thine house" (Matthew 9:3-6).

So here in this story is revealed the reason why there would ever be any miracle. Men are to believe that the One who could work these miracles is the One who can forgive sins. But we must not forget those friends. Intercessory, united prayer is effectual: those friends brought that man to the Lord and he was forgiven.

Matthew 9:9 is the record of the call of Matthew, who is generally considered as having been a banker. He was sitting at the receipt of custom (we would say income tax).

"And as Jesus forth from thence, he saw Matthew, sitting custom: and he passed forth from a man, named at the receipt of saith unto him, Follow me. And he arose, and followed him" (Matthew 9:9).

It is quite probable that Matthew may have known Jesus of Nazareth before; perhaps he had heard Him speak and seen Him work. After all, both were public figures. It might be possible any given day when you are listening to some aspect of the truth being preached, there may come a message through to your heart: "Follow me." Then it will be blessed if you do likewise, for we read Matthew arose and followed Him.

"And it came to pass, as Jesus sat at meat in the house, behold, many publicans and sinners came and sat down with him and his disciples. And when the Pharisees saw it, they said unto his disciples, Why eateth your Master with publicans and sinners? But when Jesus heard that, he said unto them, They that be whole

need not a physician, but they that are sick. But go ye and learn what that meaneth, I will have mercy, and not sacrifice: for I am not come to call the righteous, but sinners to repentance" (Matthew 9:10-13).

Jesus of Nazareth referred to an Old Testament quotation. When it comes to dealing with sinners God is revealed as saying: "I am going to deal with them on the basis of my grace and my mercy, and not because they buy their way, nor because of anything they give." It may be those Jews would seek by means of sacrifice to come into the presence of God; and this could be meaningful as showing the faith they had. But there is a principle here that needs to be recognized. Jesus of Nazareth said: "Go and study this. Understand this in your soul." This is something God has revealed: He would rather be merciful than have men try to pay Him for what He is giving for free. Jesus of Nazareth went on to say: "For I am not come to call the righteous to reward them but sinners to save them." In this way He was showing people that when He was being criticized for eating with sinners, He had power to answer this improper criticism. Power does not always have to be an explosive confrontation moving toward a serious violent conflict; power can be gentle and yet be effective.

In Matthew 9:14-17 His disciples were criticized because they were not fasting; and the disciples of John questioned this liberty of the disciples of Jesus of Nazareth. His people were not burdened, rather they were free. Jesus of Nazareth told the critics, the friends of the bridegroom cannot mourn when the bridegroom is here. Just then He was present with them: "But the days will come, when the bridegroom shall be taken from them, and then shall they fast" (Matthew 9:15). This brings to mind required conduct may not be the same at all times and for everybody. There is a freedom for believing people from earthly rules in the spiritual Kingdom. When we read in verses 16 and 17 that one doesn't sew new cloth on an old garment or put new wine in old wine skins, we remember that John puts it this way, "You must be born again." In the new life that is in Christ Jesus there is liberty.

The remainder of chapter 9 records a series of works of healing, demonstrating the power of God to heal personal needs. First is the record about the ruler's daughter being raised from the dead. The ruler had the faith to come to the Lord; Jesus of Nazareth went into the man's home: by that time the daughter had died, and He raised her from the dead. This is a challenge to all parents who feel a son or daughter is spiritually dead: come to the Lord in prayer. God can do more than you ask or think.

The record of the woman with the issue of blood reveals her inner feelings. Mark says she spent all her money on doctors and was nothing helped; but Luke, himself a doctor, says she was incurable. However, this woman had implicit confidence: "If I may but touch his garment, I shall be whole." This remains a challenge to any diseased or afflicted soul. If any person should feel there is something wrong let that soul look at this story, and ask the Lord for faith to believe.

Matthew 9:27-31 is the record of the two blind men saying: "Thou son of David, have mercy of us." They looked to Him as the promised Messiah. He challenged them saying:

"Believe ye that I am able to do this? They said unto him, Yea, Lord. Then touched he their eyes, saying, According to your faith be it unto you. And their eyes were opened" (Matthew 9:28-30).

The faith exercised in this case was their own.

Matthew 9:32-34 is the record of a dumb man who was possessed with the devil. They brought him to Jesus. Apparently there could be some question about whether the dumb man had faith, but the people who brought him did have faith. In the latter part of this chapter there is a wonderful revelation of the mind of the Lord.

"But when he saw the multitudes, he was moved with compassion on them, because they fainted, and were scattered abroad, as sheep having no shepherd. Then saith he unto his disciples, The harvest truly is plenteous, but the laborers are few; Pray ye therefore the Lord of the harvest, that he will send forth laborers into his harvest"
(Matthew 9:36-38).

In this study we have noted one incident after another which show the mighty power of God. We should keep in mind this was within the context of this world. This is the power of the Kingdom of God when it comes into contact with the natural physical world, showing that Almighty God has power to overcome and to carry out His will. What a wonderful challenge this presents to us to yield ourselves to Him, and to let Him work in us that which is well pleasing in His sight.

Commissioning The Cadre Of The Kingdom Matthew 9, 10 & 11

The topic for this particular study has in it an unusual word, "cadre": a term that refers to a select group of leaders who are commissioned to instruct and to drill the whole company. It implies something very important: Jesus of Nazareth was commissioning those who were to teach the ways of the Kingdom of God. The principles of living in the Spirit are not known to the natural man; they are not to be discovered by human investigation nor are they projected by human wit or wisdom. However, there is an authorized way of living in the Kingdom: living in faith; and this is something a soul must learn and there are people who are commissioned to teach this truth.

The authorized way of living can be described plainly as being in the will of God. But how would one know the will of God? The way of godliness can be described by obedient servants.

"For whosoever shall call upon the name of the Lord shall be saved. How then shall they call on him in whom they have not believed? and how shall they believe in him of whom they have not heard? and how shall they hear without a preacher? And how shall they preach, except they be sent" (Romans 10: 13-15)?

While it is true that Christ only can accomplish salvation, it is also true that it is the servants of the Lord, the ministers of Christ, who are commissioned to communicate the Gospel.

We shall now study the record and the revelation of how Christ Jesus prepared and instructed His chosen servants, who we call the apostles: those who were sent to preach the Word of God. As with any other aspect of the revelation one must avoid pitfalls in interpretation here, yet it is very important to study what is written. Matthew 9:36 records the dynamic of missions. This reveals to us what really makes missions operative. It is clearly seen that the call of the missionary, the inward feeling that any man or woman has that he or she should go and tell people about Christ, may not be that person's own idea.

"But when he saw the multitudes, he was moved with compassion on them because they fainted, and were scattered abroad, as sheep having no shepherd. Then saith he unto his disciples, The harvest truly is plenteous, but the laborers are few; pray ye therefore the Lord of the harvest, that he will send forth laborers into his harvest"
(Matthew 9:36-38).

The Greek word that is translated "send forth" actually means "thrust": that He may thrust forth laborers into His harvest. Those who are called to the mission field can testify they have in themselves

an inward compulsion. "Woe is me if I preach not the Gospel" is the way Paul expressed it. Thus it is the compassionate concern of Christ Jesus that is the initial dynamic, starting this thing going. We are touched as we read: "He was moved with compassion on them, because they fainted, and were scattered abroad, as sheep having no shepherd." Jesus of Nazareth, speaking to His disciples on the occasion when He was at the well with the woman of Samaria, said to them:

"Say not ye, There are yet four months, and then cometh harvest? behold, I say unto you, Lift up your eyes, and look on the fields; for they are white already to harvest" (John 4:35).

Jesus of Nazareth was impressed with the widespread emptiness of the human heart and the inward confusion of the human soul; the uncertainty and the distress in which people lived. "They fainted and were scattered abroad as sheep having no shepherd." This is not referring so much to the fact that they were weak or sinful, but that they were confused: they had no leader to guide them. Their only way into the peace of God was that they must be willing to accept the Lordship of Christ. But to be able to believe in Him, He must be preached, that He might be known.

We have noted that Jesus of Nazareth pointed to the praying of concerned believers as the means of prompting the call to potential servants, and now we shall see how He went about preparing those chosen ones to minister. In Matthew 10:1-4 is the record that He called unto Him twelve disciples, and gave them power to cast out unclean spirits and to heal all manner of sickness and all manner of disease. It sounds surprising to read: "Go not into the way of the Gentiles, and into any city of the Samaritans enter ye not: but go rather to the lost sheep of the house of Israel" (Matthew 10:6-6). Isn't that strange? This was because the Gentiles were not ready to hear the Gospel as were the Jews who knew the Old Testament Scriptures.

What was there about the message of those apostles that was limited? There was as yet no cross of Calvary; no resurrection from the dead. There was as yet no coming of the Holy Spirit. These things had been promised in the Old Testament, and Old Testament people such as the Jews could have understood. They had the shadow of the truth in the Old Testament Scriptures. But the Gentiles did not have that much, and the Samaritans did not have that at all. Because that was the case, the Gospel was not ready for the Gentiles then, but it is ready now. (Matthew 28:18-20).

But there is still more that we can learn as we note further what He told them to do. Their message was to be one of deliverance, and what a marvelous assignment they had!

"And as ye go, preach, saying, The kingdom of heaven is at hand. Heal the sick, cleanse the lepers, raise the dead, cast out devils: freely ye have received, freely give" (Matthew 10:7-8).

This was their mission. They were to go to the people of Israel, and as they went they were to heal the sick, to cleanse the leper, to raise the dead, to cast out demons. This was to be done among people who believed in the God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob; among people who had the promise of God as set forth in the writings of Moses and the prophets. The Jews had all that.

The procedure the disciples were to follow is given in Matthew 10:9-15. They were to depend on those who belonged to God to support them; they were to ask for help from such, and expect it and repay it with spiritual blessing. This was a mission to persons who were already ostensibly committed to God, and these disciples were to challenge these people to actually put their faith into practice as they put their trust in Almighty God. It will be important to remember these circumstances for we must be careful that we do not start telling everybody to do these things. Missionaries of the Gospel are not to

depend on everybody to support them. They are to depend on the people of God to support the preaching of the Gospel. Their prospect was described in verse 16, and it is sobering: "Behold, I send you forth as sheep in the midst of wolves: be ye therefore wise as serpents, and harmless as doves." Opponents are like wolves but we are to meet them wise as serpents, not exposing ourselves unnecessarily and careful about what we do; harmless as doves. Verse 17: "But beware of men." What men? Unbelieving men? No. Missionaries are to be careful about the people who are supposed to be helping them, because of these very supporters Jesus of Nazareth predicted: "for they will deliver you up to the councils, and they will scourge you in their synagogues; and ye shall be brought before governors and kings for my sake, for a testimony against them and the Gentiles" (Matthew 10:17-18). Notice now how He said: "But when they deliver you up, take no thought how or what ye shall speak: for it shall be given you in that same hour what ye shall speak" (Matthew 10:19). This is a humbling but a glorious fact. Often when we have made preparation ahead of time it is not suitable anyway. But when we draw nigh unto the Lord, and that moment comes that we are put on the spot,,it is given unto us what we shall speak. "For it is not ye that speak, but the Spirit of your Father which speaketh in you" (Matthew 10:20).

Then follows an alarming prediction that those who are actually going to communicate the Gospel need to have in mind:

"And the brother shall deliver up the brother to death, and the father the child: and the children shall rise up against their parents, and cause them to be put to death" (Matthew 10:21).

In our day and time the law generally speaking will protect the parent, but the attitude of many children toward their parents is like that of Cain toward Abel. This is why verse 26 is such a comforting promise.

"Fear them not therefore: for there is nothing covered, that shall not be revealed; and hid, that shall not be known."

This is followed by one of the most wonderful things in Scripture by way of comforting the individual:

"And fear not them which will kill the body, but are not able to kill the soul: but rather fear him which is able to destroy both soul and body in hell. Are not two sparrows sold for a farthing? and one of them shall not fall on the ground without your Father. But the very hairs of your head are all numbered. Fear ye not therefore, ye are of more value than many sparrows" (Matthew 10:28-31).

Each witness can take into account that Almighty God has him in mind, and that He who sees the sparrow fall will certainly keep His eye on the witness and he can put his trust in Him.

Jesus of Nazareth went on to say: "Whosoever therefore shall confess me before men, him will I confess also before my Father which is in heaven" (Matthew 10: 32). In many respects that is one of the most glorious promises in Scripture. If a believer names His name he will be challenged and some unbelievers will hold it against him. When that time comes the witness should stand faithful and give his simple testimony of trust in the Lord. God will be on his side because in the very presence of God the living Lord Jesus Christ is confessing that witness as belonging to Him before the Father. "But whosoever shall deny me before men, him will I also deny before my Father which is in heaven." In His

further instructions Jesus of Nazareth said something very astonishing:

"Think not that I am come to send peace on earth: I came not to send peace, but a sword. For I am come to set a man at variance against his father, and the daughter against her mother, and the daughter-in-law against her mother-in-law. And a man's foes shall be they of his own household" (Matthew 10:34-36).

How often this has happened! He goes on to say:

"He that loveth father or mother more than me is not worthy of me: and he that loveth son or daughter more than me is not worthy of me. And he that taketh not his cross, and followeth after me, is not worthy of me. He that findeth his life shall lose it: and he that loseth his life for my sake shall find it" (Matthew 10:37-39).

And so He continued to encourage His disciples to be faithful to Him.

"He that receiveth you receiveth me, and he that receiveth me receiveth him that sent me. He that receiveth a prophet in the name of a prophet shall receive a prophet's reward; and he that receiveth a righteous man in the name of a righteous man shall receive a righteous man's reward. And whosoever shall give to drink unto one of these little ones a cup of cold water only in the name of a disciple, verily I say unto you, he shall in no wise lose his reward" (Matthew 10:40-42).

This is the amazing, marvelous instruction the Lord Jesus gave to His disciples.

We might well ask ourselves at this time: what were these disciples preaching? Would this not be the message of the Sermon on the Mount? And what does that mean? Repent and believe: this is the real meaning of the law of God. Judge yourselves as unfit, repent in the sight of God and believe in the salvation provided in Christ Jesus. The major portion of this chapter is to guide, comfort and assure His followers as they preached and demonstrated the Gospel of God.

In chapter 11 the revelation of the significance of the Gospel message continues. Here we have the visit of the committee who came from John the Baptist to the Lord Jesus Christ to ask: "Art thou he that should come, or do we look for another?" Many people have thought that this reflected some shaking of John the Baptist's confidence. Far from this being any suggestion that John's faith was weakening, this was actually John looking forward and asking: "Are you the one who is coming; are you going to be the King." He had identified Him as the Lamb of God. The Lord Jesus took John's disciples and showed them the various works and miracles He did, saying: "Go tell John these things." Now those things were the signs in the Old Testament prediction that the King would perform, so He showed them the power He had; adding this word, "And the poor have the gospel preached to them."

Jesus of Nazareth commented on John the Baptist in verses 7 to 15, saying about him that he was the greatest human being that ever lived. His comment on the fickle nature of public opinion is found in verses 16 to 19. They criticized John because he lived a very frugal existence and ate very simple food, holding himself to the simple diet of a poor man. On the other hand, they criticized Jesus of Nazareth and accused Him of being a glutton, because He would eat anything and everything. That does not indicate Jesus of Nazareth was immoderate or careless in eating, but it does imply He made no particular rules about His food. Then there is a warning to those who are indifferent: judgment is coming. Finally He thanks God for His wisdom. The chapter ends with the great invitation and it is marvelous to hear Him say:

"Come unto me, all ye that labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you, and learn of me; for I am meek and lowly in heart: and ye shall find rest unto your souls. For my yoke is easy, and my burden is light" (Matthew 11:28-30).

Secrets Of The Creative Kingdom

Matthew 12 & 13

In these studies our particular interest is in the Kingdom of God in this world. There is much to learn about how the Kingdom of God grows in the believer, and there is also need to understand how others are won to come into the Kingdom of God. That is what chapters 12 and 13 in Matthew deal with. Perhaps it would be helpful to speak of the secrets of the redemptive Kingdom. There is a problem when we think about the servants of God declaring the Word of God to the world, that they might win souls to Him.

Flesh and blood cannot inherit the Kingdom of God. Men must be born again. Paul states emphatically "Therefore if any man be in Christ he is a new creature." The actual word used is "creation." Everyone is eligible: whosoever will may come; for which we thank God, who is no respecter of persons. But without faith it is impossible to please Him, and faith cometh by hearing and hearing by the Word of God. All of this makes the witness of the believer very important in the winning of souls. Again let us remind ourselves we are not so much seeking to learn about how the Holy Spirit works in the believer, but we are seeking to learn just now what is involved as God works through the believer in the world.

In Matthew 12 we see what impact Jesus of Nazareth and His followers had upon the community. The Pharisees as reported in verses 1 to 9, criticized the disciples for breaking the Sabbath. Jesus of Nazareth refuted this criticism by appealing to Scripture, and reminding them that the Bible records the case of David who, when hungry, ate bread that had been offered in the Temple. This was not lawful but he ate it because he was hungry. There are no records to show that Jesus Christ Himself ever violated any requirements of Old Testament laws. However, when this criticism was brought against His disciples He defended them. In verses 10 to 13 we have the instance where He healed the man with the withered hand on the Sabbath Day. When the Pharisees criticized Him, He pointed out to them that the law allowed a work of mercy on the Sabbath Day. His open defiance of the expressed judgment of the Pharisees so angered them they planned to kill Him; and in verses 14 to 21 we read how the hostility of the Pharisees developed until it crystalized into a decision that they would kill Him.

The hostility of the Pharisees moved them to go even further than that: they accused Him of being in league with Satan (Matthew 12:24). He answered with a simple argument that any kingdom divided against itself would fall; if He was in league with Satan and was working against Satan, that was ridiculous. Jesus of Nazareth then took the occasion to warn about sinning against the Holy Spirit (Matthew 12:31-37). The people were being affected by His testimony. The inclination to believe came from the Holy Spirit of God, working in them and moving them to have confidence in Jesus of Nazareth. When the Pharisees insinuated that His power was not the power of God but was the power of Satan, Jesus of Nazareth warned that such explanation, in which the power of God is ascribed to an evil source, is spiritually fatal. This is blasphemy against the Holy Ghost.

Scribes and Pharisees came to Jesus of Nazareth seeking a sign that would authenticate His actions (Matthew 13:38-45). There was an old Jewish tradition that if a prophet came, claiming to be a prophet of God he was to show by some supernatural work that God was with him. He told them there would be only one sign given and that was the sign of the prophet Jonah. We understand He was referring to His resurrection, the only certified sign of the Kingdom of God in the Bible, and the only certified sign ever

given by the Lord Jesus Christ. If anyone wants a symbol of what is involved in the Kingdom of God then look at the resurrection, and see how a person is translated out of the natural into the spiritual. Many times some will say with reference to the story of Jonah that it is not necessary to believe the whale actually swallowed Jonah. They give all manner of argument to show it was impossible. Such an approach entirely ignores the Almighty power of God. Gabriel told Mary nothing is impossible with God. There is actually no logical problem in understanding that God could make a whale as big as was necessary. The words of Jesus of Nazareth were plain:

"For as Jonah was three days and three nights in the whale's belly; so shall the Son of man be three days and three nights in the heart of the earth" (Matthew 12:40).

There is no way to misunderstand that. A skeptic may not believe it, but even that does not change a thing.

Matthew 12:46-50 records an incident which definitely teaches that in dealing with the Kingdom of God, earthly ties should be set aside. The people came and told Jesus of Nazareth that His mother was outside wanting to talk to Him:

"While he yet talked to the people, behold, his mother and his brethren stood without, desiring to speak with him. Then one said unto him, Behold, thy mother and thy brethren stand without, desiring to speak with thee. But he answered and said unto him that told him, Who is my mother and who are my brethren? and he stretched forth his hand toward his disciples, and said, Behold my mother and my brethren! For whosoever shall do the will of my Father which is in heaven, the same is my brother, and sister, and mother" (Matthew 12:46-50).

They would have interrupted what He was doing on the basis of their personal, human relationship with Him. His reply was not said to belittle His mother or His brethren; it was being said to emphasize that the spiritual relationship is higher than the natural relationship. In other words, the relationship with God in the Kingdom of God supersedes any natural relationship.

Throughout our discussion of what is recorded in chapter 12 we have been noting relations with the world outside. Hostility was developing and He was facing it down. In chapter 13 there is a slightly different emphasis. Here we shall see the inner operation of faith in the souls of those who hear the Gospel. This is told in a series of parables. How faith works is not explained: it is simply illustrated. The first parable recorded is probably one of the most famous parables ever told by Jesus of Nazareth: it is commonly called the Parable of the Sower. That is not actually the spiritual title; the parable is not about the sower: it is about the four kinds of soil. Someone has said that a parable is an earthly story with a heavenly meaning. It is a story of processes that can be seen and understood in nature, which are so told as to illustrate something that is true in the spirit. The focus in this parable is upon the reception given to the Word of God which, as spoken by the witnesses, is the seed. The seed was scattered among all kinds of soil just as the Word is preached to all kinds of people. When we look at the four different kinds of soil represented in this parable we remember the seed was the same in each case. It is important to interpret a parable just as it reads. The point will be clear. No attempt should be made to improve it, nor should one try to make more of it than it plainly implies. The reader should avoid changing its emphasis: if it was supposed to mean something else it would have been told differently.

Everyone knows the story of the Sower and the Seed. It is easy to visualize someone sowing lawn grass, walking along with a bucket or with a bag under one arm, swinging his other arm around, and scattering the seed in this fashion. In those days that was the way the sowing was done in the field: there

was no machinery for it. The seed fell everywhere. In this parable there were four kinds of ground: one was hard ground like a path across a field; and when the seed fell there it did not sink into the ground. The birds of the heaven came and picked it up, and took it away. The second kind of soil was shallow because of stones in the field. The seed that fell into that ground grew up fast, but when the sun rose and became hot the seed withered, because it did not have long roots so that it dried up. The third kind of soil was very weedy. The seed that fell there grew but the weeds also grew and choked the seed, and it became unfruitful. The fourth kind was good soil where the seed grew well and brought forth fruit.

Jesus of Nazareth interpreted the meaning of the parable. He said if anyone hears the Word of the Kingdom and does not understand it, he is like the hard ground, where the seed fell by the wayside. The seed did not get into the soil. This would mean that a person could hear the words of the Gospel, but if those words meant nothing hearing them would not do a bit of good.

The second kind of soil illustrates the person who hears the word with joy but he does not have root in himself because he has not grasped the truth that is involved. The Gospel would say God sent His Son to save us from sin. If a person does not have a true concept of God or of sin, he cannot realize what Jesus Christ did. If a person does not realize that the sinner is condemned before God, he could not ever get the point of having a Substitute die for him. And if he does not know the meaning of this the truth would slip away and not be useful. The second group heard with joy, but did not have any root in themselves; so the ideas they had were not grounded deep in their hearts. When tribulation and persecution arose because of the Word they quit; and such people often seem to feel that the quitting is their option. We who know the Gospel know that is not true because they will still have to face God.

The third kind of soil illustrates the person who hears the Word and believes and understands it; but the cares of this world and the deceitfulness of riches choke the Word and he becomes unfruitful. He cannot really turn himself over to God because his heart and mind are so full of so many things that choke out the truth of the Gospel.

Finally there is the person who hears the Word and understands it, and so brings forth fruit. This is the good ground. The Gospel may be presented faithfully, but in some instances there may not be any result. Just as the condition of the soil determines the result of the crop so the condition of the heart determines the results with a person.

In the parable of the wheat and the tares Jesus of Nazareth tells about a man who planted wheat in his field, and in the nighttime an enemy came and sowed tares, or weeds. While they were growing and only the green blades were seen, the difference could not be recognized; but when the fruit began to appear the difference could be detected. The servants asked the master: "Shall we tear up those weeds?" And the master said, "No, let them grow together until the harvest because in taking out the tares you might disturb some of the wheat. When the harvest comes they will be separated. The wheat will be taken into the granary to be kept and the tares will be burned."

This is a very sober fact. Right in our congregations there are people who do not believe in God; they have not yielded to the Lord Jesus Christ. The difference between such and true believers cannot be discerned now. If it were recognized in some cases and they were removed, some true believer could be hurt. The Word of the Lord is plain: "Let them both grow together until the harvest. The day is coming for the harvest, and when that time comes they will go through the threshing mill; and the wheat will be kept and the tares will be thrown away."

There are a number of other parables in this chapter. The parable of the mustard seed illustrates the vitality of the Kingdom of God: when it is preached the vitality of the Gospel is great. Whenever the truth starts growing in the heart the growth is phenomenal. Then again, there is the parable of the leaven,

in which a woman baked bread putting leaven in her meal. The leaven spread through the whole loaf (it wasn't necessary to put the leaven in all the dough; the leaven itself would work through the whole loaf).

Jesus of Nazareth used parables to illustrate His meaning because the parables, which were practical illustrations, were like windows that let light into the idea that He was sharing. There are a number of short parables in the remainder of the chapter. Finally there is the very interesting parable of the net. The net was thrown out so that fish of every kind were gathered in. This seems to illustrate the evangelizing work of the Gospel when persons are called to join the Lord's people. There will be some to come who do not really believe but they will all be taken together. However there will be a judgment, and then there will be a separation: the Lord says there shall be wailing and gnashing of teeth.

At the end of this chapter there is the record of an incident that showed the testimony of Jesus of Nazareth was not believed everywhere. It would seem that the work He did, illustrated by His teaching, would seem so reasonable and so powerful that it would be enough to persuade people to believe in Him. But here is to be noted one of the tragedies in the Christian Gospel: the people who knew Him were the very ones who rejected Him. His neighbors asked: "Is not this the carpenter's son?" That is the only place in the Bible where this question is recorded. In the one other account of this incident the question was phrased: "Is not this the son of Joseph?" In both instances the questions were asked by unbelievers. Anyone can have in mind that when reference is made to Jesus of Nazareth as "the carpenter of Galilee" this is not Bible language: this is the language of the people who rejected Him. They did not believe that He was the Son of God. It is distressing to read this serious statement: "And he did not many mighty works there because of their unbelief" (Matthew 13:58).

I am inclined to wonder whether one of the reasons so much of our church work is weak in this day and so much of our Christian education is so barren, is because we join other people in emphasizing the humanity of Jesus Christ without recognizing He was actually the Son of God. The One who died on Calvary's cross was the Son of God; the One who rose from the dead was the Son of God; and the One in whom I put my trust is the Son of God. If a soul believes that, God will do great things; but if a person thinks of Him as a good man, there is very little going to happen spiritually. "He did not many mighty works there because of their unbelief."

The Faith At The Foundation Of The Kingdom Matthew 14, 15, & 16

The only way the topic for this study can have meaning will be to phrase it this way: Faith as the Foundation of the Kingdom. We understand by the terms "the Kingdom" all that over which the king rules - the Kingdom of God, is the Kingdom of Christ where He rules over willing subjects who want to please Him. No human being of flesh and blood can ever enter into that Kingdom : you must be born again; and the new birth is possible only by faith. Faith is not natural - it is not innate. We are not born with faith; it is acquired. We learn it. It is actually given by God, just as physical strength is given by God, as the consequence of food and drink, so spiritual strength, the strength to believe, is a consequence; given to us by God, but as a consequence of certain factors. God provides food, drink, and health from which comes our strength to live and to do. God provides promises, demonstrations of power and testimonies, which produce faith to believe.

This chapter is based on Matthew 14, 15 and 16, with emphasis on the latter part of chapter 16, verses 13 to 28. The whole account by Matthew is the story of events that followed the coming of the Son of God into this world to establish the Kingdom of God. Matthew gives us a record of how He came

to seek and to save the lost, to redeem them that were under the law. He came to call sinners to repentance and to faith; to deliver the captives and to set them free.

The 14th chapter of Matthew begins with the death of John the Baptist. Herod had been impressed by John, but Herod had failed to act positively in response, and fell into a trap. He was tricked into executing John. In this he is an example of how many people wind up doing wrong simply because they did not do what was right.

Matthew 14:13-14 is the account of how Jesus of Nazareth went forth and saw the multitudes. He was moved with compassion upon them, and He healed their sick. Then the record follows along to one of the great miracles of the Bible: the feeding of the five thousand. It is astonishing to read from time to time how men try to explain this in such a way as to take the miracle out of it; even suggesting that what actually happened was that the people were so enamored with Jesus of Nazareth and so affected by His talk, they just thought they had food. Of course such a suggestion is ridiculous in face of the record that there were twelve baskets full of fragments left over: that is not just imagination.

Another great miracle is reported in Matthew 14:22-33 when Jesus of Nazareth walked on the water, coming to His disciples in their boat in the midst of a storm. They thought they saw a ghost, but He called to them: "Fear not, it is I." Peter said: "Lord, if it be thou, bid me come unto thee on the water." When Jesus of Nazareth said, "Come," Peter walked on the water toward the Lord. But when he saw the waves become boisterous, he began to sink, and cried out, "Lord, save me."

And immediately Jesus stretched forth His hand, and caught him, and said unto him, "O thou of little faith, wherefore didst thou doubt?" When they did finally come to shore they worshipped Him, saying: "Of a truth thou art the Son of God." He was manifesting to them the power that was His in order that they should come to this very conclusion. He continued this manifestation when they came into the land of Gennesaret and a great multitude crowded around Him and besought Him that they might only touch the hem of His garment and be healed. The record is impressive: "As many as touched were made perfectly whole."

In chapter 15 the record continues of Jesus of Nazareth moving among the people. We should remember that Jesus of Nazareth in that personal human body was actually embodying in their sight the Kingdom of God, confronting the whole world in which He lived and demonstrating to them what the Kingdom of God would be and do: God Himself being in the human being, working out His will. The disciples were criticized because they were not following the custom of washing their hands in a ceremonial way before they ate; thus they were accused of eating with unwashed hands. The Jewish people had a tradition, which the Pharisees maintained, of ceremonial washing of the hands so as to imply their hands were clean. All of this was related originally to the idea of having clean food. The disciples did not practice this traditional ceremony and for this omission they were criticized. Jesus of Nazareth quoted Isaiah, "This people draw near me with their mouth, and with their lips do honor me, but have removed their heart far from me" (Isaiah 29:13). When the matter was further discussed and His own disciples wondered what He would do about these critics, He made this comment: "Let them alone: they be blind leaders of the blind. And if the blind lead the blind, both shall fall into the ditch" (Matthew 15:14). The critics were headed for disaster. The whole situation which caused this criticism was superficial, and He exposed the fallacy of it. There is no evidence that the Lord Jesus ever failed to recognize the traditional requirements, whatever they might be; but when the critics accused His disciples of breaking a tradition in conduct, He pointed out that the criticism itself was based on a very superficial and inadequate rule.

A woman of Canaan came to ask Him for the healing of her daughter. She was a Gentile, but she had

faith that she could come to Jesus of Nazareth, and her daughter would be healed. The Old Testament pointed forward to this, that "in Him should the Gentiles trust." This incident revealed the truth of the Gospel. The Gospel is for all men; and even though this woman would have been traditionally shut out, because according to their culture she did not belong, she understood that she could come to Him and that He would respond to her needs. Matthew 15:30-31 reports that great multitudes came unto Him with their sick and maimed, and were healed. It is not surprising that we read "they glorified the God of Israel."

By doing these works of mercy and power Jesus of Nazareth was teaching all men who came in contact with Him, the real meaning of the revelation of God as it was in the Old Testament Scriptures: the real meaning as to what the God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob meant to people. Among other things He meant all this that Jesus of Nazareth was doing. God was promising such blessing and one day these things will be done just that way: it will then be fully realized what God will do for those who put their trust in Him. Matthew 15:32-38 is the account of the feeding of the four thousand. In connection with this we see how He took the little that they had and multiplied it so as to feed all of them. In this case there were seven baskets full of leftovers, fragments of bread and fish. In all this He was manifesting the power and grace of God.

The Pharisees and the Sadducees came to ask Him to show a sign. Such an action would have special meaning among the Jews. From time to time in Jewish history there were men who came as the prophets of God. Such men had a special message from Almighty God, and it was the custom of the people of Israel to look for some evidence that would demonstrate that this person was authorized to speak for God. So it was their custom if a prophet came, challenging people to believe in God and challenging them to accept him as a messenger from God, to ask him to offer a sign that would establish his authenticity. When these people did likewise it was not because they had any confidence in Jesus of Nazareth, but it was more like a trick to put Him on the spot. The Sadducees were skeptical about Him. If He had gone ahead and given them a sign in this fashion, He would have been conceding something to the validity of their request. He refused to do it. He told them plainly, "There shall no sign be given unto it, but the sign of the prophet Jonah" (Matthew 16:4). This is something to be noted for all time. The resurrection of Jesus Christ is the only authorized sign or symbol of the Gospel of the Lord Jesus Christ. The great truth in the Gospel is that God will redeem and deliver, by regenerating and putting a new life in the old. In the case of Jesus of Nazareth, His body was put to death and after three days God revived that body and He raised it from the dead.

Then the Lord Jesus turned to His disciples and gave them a significant warning (Matthew 16:6-12) against the doctrine of the Pharisees and the Sadducees. The doctrine of the Pharisees was simply this: outward conformity to rules and regulations is what it takes to get right with God. They were wrong. The Sadducees, on the other hand, did not believe in the resurrection: they denied the power of the supernatural and affirmed the goodness of man. These are the two dangerous pitfalls that every person studying the truth of God must avoid. Religious formality on the one side can be an actual snare, just as rational skepticism, philosophic agnosticism can be on the other side. A person can become so sophisticated in his mentality that he does not believe in God any more. The Lord Jesus warned His people against either one.

Peter's confession (Matthew 16:13-20) is one of the high points in the Gospel record. When Jesus of Nazareth asked: "Whom do men say that I the Son of man am?" they told Him the various things that people were saying about Him. Then He asked them: "But whom say ye that I am?" Peter spoke up: "Thou art the Christ, the Son of the living God." The Lord said to him: "Blessed are thou, Simon

Barjona: for flesh and blood hath not revealed it unto thee, but my Father which is in heaven" (Matthew 16:17). Faith is not derived from human argument but it is given to the willing person from God. When Peter made his confession, Jesus of Nazareth made this significant statement: "Upon this rock I will build my church." This seems to mean that upon this heartfelt conviction, this foundation (that Jesus of Nazareth is the Son of God) the Lord will build His church. He also said, "I will give unto thee the keys of the kingdom of heaven" (Matthew 16:10). This statement does not so much say anything about the man Peter, but it has something to say about that group of believers who will be banded together in what the Bible talks about as the Church, the Body of Christ. To Peter and his associates, the apostolic company, was given the capacity, the privilege and the authority to open the Kingdom of Heaven to those who listened to the preaching of the Gospel.

Immediately after that He told them that He would be put to death. When he said this, Peter rebuked Him and said: "Be it far from thee, Lord: this shall not be unto thee." But Jesus of Nazareth then said: "Got thee behind me, Satan: thou art an offense unto me: for thou savorest not the things that be of God, but those that be of men" (Matthew 16:23). When He used the word "savor" He meant it like "taste." When He said, "Thou savorest not the things that be of God, but those that be of men," He meant "You do not taste like God, you taste like a man." Because Peter was thinking like a man he failed to recognize the will of God: he did not realize Christ Jesus needed to go to the cross. The closing verses of the chapter report a discussion which shows the way in which Jesus of Nazareth taught that the Kingdom of Heaven is most valuable, saying:

"If any man will come after me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross, and follow me. For whosoever will save his life shall lose it: and whosoever will lose his life for my sake shall find it" (Matthew 16:24-25).

Jesus of Nazareth went on to argue: "For what is a man profited, if he shall gain the whole world, and lose his own soul? or what shall a man give in exchange for his soul" (Matthew 16:26)? This is a question the Gospel poses for everybody. The Gospel of the Lord Jesus Christ calls upon men to yield themselves to God. It involves forsaking everything that is a man's own, even to his social relationships, even to his own family and putting the Lord Jesus Christ first. Certain benefits will then follow. There is nothing worthy of comparison to a person's inward personal relationship with Almighty God forever. "For the Son of man shall come in the glory of his Father with his angels; and then he shall reward every man according to his works"(Matthew 16:27).

The real significance of living comes out in the perspective of eternity. Actually what it looks like in the sight of God is what makes all the difference in the world. This is the faith that is basic to entering the Kingdom. This is the kind of attitude a man must have in his heart, and this is the kind of action he must take in his own soul: choosing Christ only, yielding entirely to God, letting everything be in His hands. This is the very beginning of the spiritual experience that we are talking about, entering the Kingdom of God.

Kingdom Lessons In Light Of The Cross

Matthew 17,18,19,& 20

The things of Christ are commonly referred to in our culture and general conversation. Even if few persons ever read the Scripture records, it is generally assumed that the main features of the story of Jesus of Nazareth are common knowledge. All know that He was born in Bethlehem, laid in a manger,

began preaching at about thirty years of age, worked miracles, offended the establishment, was betrayed by Judas, was crucified, reported to be raised from the dead. The records are questioned as to their authenticity. The fact that they tell about the voice from Heaven is passed over. The angel - well, that was according to the time. The miracles - probably exaggerations. The literal resurrection from dead -- well, that's the way it seemed. The ascension into Heaven - oh well, that's just one place. The present ministry in Heaven - that's just one of those things that are in the imagination. Coming again - now let's not get to be like that. This is the general reaction by and large. But how often is it remembered that His death was necessary; that He came to die intentionally; and that He would say "No man taketh my life from me. I lay it down, I take it up again."

To understand the events in the life of Jesus Christ it is necessary to remember the reality of two worlds: there is earth and there is Heaven. The things here on earth we can see; the things that are in Heaven we cannot see. Jesus of Nazareth was the incarnation in the flesh of the Son of God - in human form, yes; but God really. He was the living and walking embodiment of the Kingdom of God. Each action of His life as reported is classic. While living in this world in the flesh He was limited, like as we are, but He was destined to break out of these limitations. In the course of living in the flesh He eventually would die, but God would raise Him from the dead. As the time of His death drew near some events occurred that have special significance, and we shall now study some of these as they are recorded in Matthew, chapters 17, 18, 19 and 20.

"And after six days Jesus taketh Peter, James, and John his brother, and bringeth them up into a high mountain apart, and was transfigured before them: and his face did shine as the sun, and his raiment was white as the light. And behold, there appeared unto them Moses and Elijah talking with him. Then answered Peter, and said unto Jesus, Lord, it is good for us to be here: if thou wilt, let us make here three tabernacles; one for thee, and one for Moses, and one for Elijah. While he yet spake, behold, a bright cloud overshadowed them: and behold a voice out of the cloud, which said, This is my beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased; hear ye him. And when the disciples heard it, they fell on their face, and were sore afraid. And Jesus came and touched them, and said, Arise, and be not afraid. And when they had lifted up their eyes, they saw no man, save Jesus only" (Matthew 17:1-8)

It appears that nothing came down on Jesus of Nazareth; it was a glory that shone through Him. This is a much needed element in our conception of the Kingdom of God. When we consider the matter of having God working in us to will and to do of His good pleasure; if we are to have in mind Christ in us, the hope of glory, if we are to think in terms of being in the Kingdom of God because God in the person of the Holy Spirit and of the Lord Jesus Christ is actually in us, we will need to have in mind something like the transfiguration. Outwardly believers may look like ordinary human beings but inwardly there is something true that is as wonderful and glorious as the very presence of God Himself.

Matthew 17:14-21 presents a short story about the healing of an afflicted child. When Jesus of Nazareth and His disciples came down from the mountain, a large crowd of people were gathered. A man came running to Jesus of Nazareth and told Him he had a child who was afflicted, possessed of a demon and in bondage. The disciples had been unable to deliver him. Jesus of Nazareth said: "Bring him hither to me." After He had delivered the child, the disciples asked: "Why could not we cast him out?" He told them plainly: "Because of your unbelief." Then He told them: "Howbeit this kind goeth not out but by prayer and fasting." This is something for us to remember when we are thinking about the Kingdom of God. We can count of the power of God being exercised in us and through us, but it is related to the faith we have. "According to your faith be it unto you." It is possible for persons who believe in God and in the Lord Jesus Christ to have no power in personal testimony. These disciples were an example of that.

Jesus of Nazareth predicted He would die.

"And while they abode in Galilee, Jesus said unto them, The Son of man shall be betrayed into the hands of men: and they shall kill him, and the third day he shall be raised again. And they were exceeding sorry" (Matthew 17:22-23).

The flesh of Jesus of Nazareth (a godly man who had never sinned) must die. It is important to keep this in mind. To break out of this earthly bondage and to come into the presence of God, there will be one form or another of death involved. There must be death to the flesh that we might live in the Spirit.

"And when they were come to Capernaum, they that received tribute money came to Peter, and said, Doth not your master pay tribute? He saith. Yes. And when he was come into the house, Jesus prevented him, saying, What thinkest thou, Simon? of whom do the kings of the earth take custom or tribute? of their own children, or of strangers? Peter saith unto him, Of strangers. Jesus saith unto him, Then are the children free. Notwithstanding, lest we should offend them, go thou to the sea, and cast a hook, and take up the fish that first cometh up; and when thou hast opened his mouth, thou shalt find a piece of money; that take, and give unto them for me and thee" (Matthew 17:24-27).

We do ourselves a disfavor if we avoid those instances in the Gospel wherein something is done beyond the natural. If we do not face up to the supernatural character of the Kingdom of God we shall miss it. When God is working He is not subject to the limitations of the natural process; He can overrule. Also, in this story we should not overlook the point that at any time we should be willing to forego our own advantage so as not to offend others.

"At the same time came the disciples unto Jesus, saying, Who is the greatest in the kingdom of heaven? And Jesus called a little child unto him, and set him in the midst of them, and said, Verily I say unto you, Except ye be converted, and become as little children, ye shall not enter into the kingdom of heaven" (Matthew 18:1-3).

How many of us take this seriously? Can you see in this a warning about the grave danger in sophistication? Our hearts are impressed in recognition of the fact that there are many humble, simple minded people who live in fellowship with God to a far greater degree than many smart folks. On the other hand, there are many intellectuals who are unable to make any headway in their personal relationship to the very God who made them. A very solemn warning is given to urge me to be careful how I treat others:

"Woe unto the world because of offenses! for it must needs be that offenses come; but woe to that man by whom the offense cometh! Wherefore if thy hand or thy foot offend thee, cut them off, and cast them from thee: it is better for thee to enter into life halt or maimed, rather than having two hands or two feet to be cast into everlasting fire" (Matthew 18:7-8).

I should discipline myself. It would be better for me to cut some things out than to have everything I want to and go to hell. I read:

"And if thine eye offend thee, pluck it out, and cast it from thee: it is better for thee to enter into life with one eye, rather than having two eyes to be cast into hell fire. Take heed that ye despise not one of these little ones: for I say unto you, That in heaven their angels do always behold the face of my Father which is in heaven" (Matthew 18:9-10).

This is the outstanding verse in the New Testament that is the basis for the thinking of many who are

inclined to feel there is such an arrangement made for helping believers as is called "the guardian angels." Most important is this stern warning from the Lord: "Take heed that ye despise not one of these little ones." I do not think this is referring only to an infant, this refers to believers, those humble, simple believers who take God's Word as it reads.

"For the Son of man is come to save that which was lost" (Matthew 18:11). Jesus of Nazareth told that wonderful parable of the shepherd with the hundred sheep, who left the ninety-nine that were safe to look for the one who had wandered away. The meaning of the parable is plainly stated: "Even so it is not the will of your Father which is in heaven, that one of these little ones should perish"(Matthew 18:14). This is a sober warning we should be very careful that we do not do anything to injure the humble, simple minded believer. God is on his side, and the Lord Jesus Christ will take care of him.

"Moreover if thy brother shall trespass against thee, go and tell him his fault between thee and him alone: if he shall hear thee, thou hast gained thy brother. But if he will not hear thee, then take with thee one or two more, that in the mouth of two or three witnesses every word may be established. And if he shall neglect to hear them, tell it unto the church: but if he neglect to hear the church, let him be unto thee as a heathen man and a publican" (Matthew 18:15-17).

When I am told to let such a man be unto me as a heathen and a publican it does not mean that I have any license to hurt him. I would not expect to have fellowship with him; and I might not talk to him about the things of the Lord, but I certainly would not harm him.

"Verily I say unto you, Whatsoever ye shall bind on earth shall be bound in heaven: and whatsoever ye shall loose on earth shall be loosed in heaven" (Matthew 18:18).

What I do here on earth actually counts. So I should be very careful to do the right thing.

"For where two or three are gathered together in my name, there am I in the midst of them" (Matthew 18:20). Because this is true among believers I come to another serious problem:

"Then came Peter to him, and said, Lord, how oft shall my brother sin against me, and I forgive him? till seven times? Jesus saith unto him, I say not unto thee, Until seven times: but, Until seventy times seven" (Matthew 18:21-22).

The Master is saying I should forgive my brother an uncounted number of times. This admonition is enforced by another parable with a strong message: the parable of the unforgiving servant. A man had a servant who owed him a certain amount of money; and because he asked him to do so the master forgave him. That servant had another fellow servant who owed him a little bit of money; and he would not forgive that man about that little bit of money. He brought the law down on him. Word came to the master that the servant who had been forgiven would not forgive his fellow-servant. The master called him in and said:

"O thou wicked servant, I forgave thee all that debt, because thou desiredst me: shouldst not thou also have had compassion on thy fellow servant, even as I had pity on thee? And his lord was wroth, and delivered him to the tormentors, till he should pay all that was due unto him" (Matthew 18:32-34).

Apparently the forgiveness of his debt was cancelled. The meaning of this parable is plainly stated:

"So likewise shall my heavenly Father do also unto you, if ye from your hearts forgive not every one his brother their trespasses" (Matthew 18:35).

We are just now thinking of Kingdom lessons in the light of the cross, and noticing that living in a way that is acceptable to God involves repeated self denial. Matthew 19:1-12 presents a discussion of divorce. The overall meaning of this portion may not be clear to all but it will be enough to say divorce is not in God's plan for man. Matthew 19:13-15 reports little children coming to Jesus of Nazareth, and the disciples trying to keep them away. The Master said: "Suffer little children, and forbid them not, to come unto me: for of such is the kingdom of heaven" (Matthew 19:14).

Matthew 19:16-22 tells the story of the rich young ruler who learned what it would take to become a follower of Jesus Christ: ". . . go and sell that thou hast, and give to the poor, and thou shalt have treasure in heaven: and come and follow me. " When they saw this as it happened, the disciples asked: "Who then can be saved?" Jesus of Nazareth had just said that a rich man shall only with difficulty enter into the Kingdom of Heaven. He would have to get rid of his money and humble himself before God. This is difficult to do. When Peter asked what reward they could expect, since the disciples had already done this, Jesus of Nazareth assured them that anybody who had forsaken things in this world for the Lord would receive a hundred-fold in reward, and would inherit everlasting life. The strange parable of the workers in the vineyard is recorded in the 20th chapter of Matthew. Some servants worked all day, some worked three quarters of a day, some half a day, some one quarter of a day and some only one hour; yet each received the same. This parable emphasizes that comparison between those who receive the grace of God is discouraged.

Jesus of Nazareth then predicted His death again in Matthew 20:17-19. After that the mother of Zebedee's children came to Him with a personal request. She asked that her two sons, James and John, be given the privilege to sit in the Kingdom one on His right hand and the other on His left. Jesus of Nazareth did not grant her request. This is one of the few unanswered prayers in Scriptural record. After receiving this request He taught "Whosoever will be chief among you, let him be your servant" (Matthew 20:27).

Toward the end of this chapter we have the record of the healing of the two blind men. As in the other works of grace recorded as having been done by Jesus of Nazareth there is a special aspect of truth revealed for our learning.

". . . What will ye that I shall do unto you? They say unto him, Lord, that our eyes may be opened. So Jesus had compassion on them, and touched their eyes: and immediately their eyes received sight, and they followed him" (Matthew 20:30-34).

These two men had a specific need, they asked plainly for that, and that is what they received.

Thus we can see in these chapters certain things we must keep in mind when we think about the Kingdom of God.

Encounter Of The Old Order And The New Kingdom Matthew 21, 22, & 23

Do you have in mind that the term "old" and "new" with reference to spiritual affairs refers to "earthly" and "heavenly"; that is, to the "natural" and to the "spiritual"? We can use the term "the old order" in referring to the affairs of natural human beings, when we have in mind that Christ Jesus brings into the world the possibilities of a new life in Him. The persons who are called "natural" human beings are biological in origin: they have a human father and mother; physical in nature, living according to their

senses in dealing with what they hear, see, taste, touch and smell in this natural world. These are the natural human beings who live in this world as we all do. It is this which is referred to as "the old order." The term "the new Kingdom" refers to the affairs of born again persons, who are spiritual in their origin, begotten of God; living by faith in the promises of God. They have God as their Father, and Heaven as their home. Paul said:

"Therefore if any man be in Christ, he is a new creature: old things are passed away; behold, all things are become new" (II Corinthians 5:17).

During the New Testament period the only example of the Kingdom of God on earth was in the person of Jesus of Nazareth. Since the atoning sacrifice on Calvary, the burial of His body, the resurrection of the body of Jesus of Nazareth, and the coming of the Holy Spirit at Pentecost, it has now been possible that all souls who accept Christ Jesus as Savior and Lord, and receive the Holy Spirit, should live as citizens of that eternal Kingdom of God. At the time of the New Testament events which are recorded in Matthew, the encounter of "the old order" and "the new Kingdom" means the encounter of "the world" and "Jesus of Nazareth."

In Matthew chapter 21 we will be noting aspects of the encounter of Jesus of Nazareth with the world. In the first eleven verses of chapter 21 we have the familiar incident that is commonly called "The Triumphal Entry," when Jesus of Nazareth came to the city of Jerusalem, riding upon a colt. The Old Testament predicted that the Messiah, who was to reign as King of Kings and Lord of Lords, would come riding upon a colt. Matthew reports in chapter 21:4-6 "All this was done, that it might be fulfilled which was spoken by the prophet." (See Zechariah 9:9).

There is more miracle in this incident than is commonly recognized. It is suggested by the comment we find in other Scriptures (Mark 11:2) that no man had ever sat on that colt. Think of Jesus of Nazareth riding a young donkey down a city street, with a crowd of people singing, tossing garments into the air; and that colt who had never been ridden before, walking down that street carrying a man! That the whole event was very impressive is implied in what happened: "And a very great multitude spread their garments in the way" (Matthew 21:8).

Matthew goes on to report what happened next (Matthew 21:10-16). Jesus of Nazareth went into the Temple, where three significant things happened. He cast out all who were money changing, and buying and selling in the Temple. (They were selling the animals used for sacrifice, but Jesus of Nazareth saw this was a matter of making merchandise in the very house of God). While the language does indicate drastic action, there is no description of a display of violence. Instead there is a record of works of mercy and grace.

"And the blind and the lame came to him in the temple; and he healed them" (Matthew 21:14).

When the older people, the leaders of the Temple, complained about the uproar caused by the enthusiasm of the crowd, they came to Jesus of Nazareth, and asked Him to quiet the children. He told them that if He should quiet those children the very stones would break out in praise. He quoted Scripture: "Out of the mouth of babes and sucklings thou hast perfected praise" (Matthew 21:16). In all this He showed that He had authority.

Matthew 21:17-22 records an incident that presents an important spiritual truth to our minds: the cursing of the barren fig tree. As Jesus of Nazareth was walking with His disciples to Jerusalem, He saw a fig tree without fruit. He spoke these words: "Let no fruit grow on thee henceforward forever." The

next morning the tree was withered. When the disciples told Him about it, He told them to have faith in God. He promised them "And all things, whatsoever ye shall ask in prayer, believing, ye shall receive" (Matthew 21:22). When God exercises His power here on earth it is revealed in events like this.

In view of these actions by Jesus of Nazareth there was a very natural reaction on the part of the Temple leaders: they challenged His authority. They asked Jesus of Nazareth: "By what authority doest thou these things?" The response of Jesus of Nazareth should be significant to us. He answered their question with a question, which challenged their right to question Him at all. Did He not know the answer to their question? Of course He knew. But it was His custom in dealing with questioners, to never allow any questioner to set the stage and conduct the discussion on his basis. Jesus of Nazareth faced every question He was ever asked in such a way as to make use of that occasion to declare some aspect of the truth He wanted to declare.

In this case He replied to these Pharisees by asking them about the baptism of John, whence was it? This confused them: if they said the baptism of John was from God He would ask, "Why didn't you obey Him?" and if they said the baptism of John was not from God, the people would not like it, since the people thought John was a prophet. So they gave a politic answer: "We cannot tell." Whereupon Jesus of Nazareth said: "Neither tell I you by what authority I do these things." There is much to learn here about guidance in dealing with questions. Discussion of any problem on the ground of a skeptic will be unfruitful idle talk. We may also learn this truth: the Kingdom as seen in Jesus of Nazareth does not recognize the claims of the old order, and does not concede that the questions of an unbeliever are valid.

Jesus of Nazareth followed His handling of the question about His authority by telling the parable of the two sons whose father told them to work in the field (Matthew 21:28-32). One said he would not go, but afterwards he changed his mind and went. The other said he would go, but changed his mind and didn't go. The Master asked the people which one of the two sons did the will of his father. Of course, it was obvious: the one who went into the field and worked. Actions speak louder than words; it is not what we say, it is what we do that counts. This is extremely important when we think about measuring up to the commands of God. What does God want me to do? How shall I walk? Walk is always more significant than talk.

Following this Jesus of Nazareth told another parable that is placed in a vineyard (Matthew 21:35-46). A man with a vineyard was leaving the country. He rented out his vineyard to his servants, giving each a portion to work for himself. Later he sent an agent to get a report from his tenants. His agent was mistreated. He sent another agent, who was also mistreated. Finally he sent his son to get the report; the tenants killed him. The Master then asked His hearers what they thought about what happened in the parable. They told Him it was obvious that:

"He will miserably destroy those wicked men, and will let out his vineyard unto other husbandman, which shall render him the fruits in their seasons" (Matthew 21:41).

The people hearing this parable easily understood what He was implying: the Jews had the advantage; the Messiah came to them. Salvation was of the Jews but they rejected Him. Then the Gospel would be taken to the Gentiles. All of that is to be felt in this incident.

Matthew 22:1-10 presents the well known parable of the wedding feast, wherein the king sent out his invitation to those who were chosen to be guests at the wedding feast. The excuses that were made are common knowledge.

"But they made light of it, and went their ways, one to his farm, another to his merchandise: and the remnant took his servants, and entreated them spitefully, and slew them. But when the king heard thereof, he was wroth: and he sent forth his armies, and destroyed those murderers, and burned up their city. Then saith he to his servants, The wedding is ready, but they which were bidden were not worthy. Go ye therefore into the highways, and as many as ye shall find, bid to the marriage. So those servants went out into the highways, and gathered together all as many as they found, both bad and good: and the wedding was furnished with guests" (Matthew 22:5-10).

Here again is revealed a preview of what will happen in the spreading of the Gospel: the message came to the Jews and when they did not respond, it was carried to the Gentiles.

Following this is the record of an interesting incident: when the king came to greet the guests, he saw a man who had not a wedding garment.

"And when the king came in to see the guests, he saw there a man which had not on a wedding garment: and he saith unto him, Friend, how camest thou in hither not having a wedding garment? And he was speechless. Then said the king to the servants, Bind him hand and foot, and take him away, and cast him into outer darkness; there shall be weeping and gnashing of teeth. For many are called, but few are chosen" (Matthew 22:11-14).

What does that mean? It seems that people who do not appreciate the grace of God in the Gospel will be punished.

After this Matthew records an important section with four classic questions. The question of the Pharisees' outlook (Matthew 22:15-22), was, Is it required? Do the people of God have to pay taxes to the Roman government? The Sadducees deny the reality of the spiritual world; the reality of Heaven; the resurrection; the soul; angels, in fact anything which implied the reality of the spiritual world. They posed a question, implying that what He was telling them about living in Heaven was not reasonable: they asked: is it reasonable to believe what He was saying? The lawyer was well versed in the Scriptures, and he also posed a question, asking, "Master, which is the great commandment in the law" (Matthew 22:36)? These three questions: Is it required or legal? is it reasonable to us, rational? is it good, moral? were dealt with by Jesus of Nazareth. After that He asked another question (Matthew 22:41-46). "What think ye of Christ?" This is the most important question: is it spiritual? These four questions indicate four different points of view in judging what is acceptable in thinking about what is the right way to come to God for blessing. Only the fourth frame of mind will do! What do you think of Jesus Christ?

In chapter 23 there is an amazing discussion in which Jesus of Nazareth sets forth an indictment of the scribes and the Pharisees, penetrating into the weakness and the fallacies of their views. "The scribes and Pharisees sit in Moses' seat" refers to the custom that they occupy that place in the synagogue where they give out instructions, reading the law of Moses and giving the meaning. It was their practice to teach things they did not follow themselves. The Master went on to point out:

"But all their works they do for to be seen of men: they make broad their phylacteries, and enlarge the borders of their garments, and love the uppermost rooms at feasts, and the chief seats in the synagogues, and greetings in the markets, and to be called of men, Rabbi, Rabbi" (Matthew 23:5-7).

They do all their works for men to notice them, even to the extent that "and for pretense they make long prayer" that they might be looked up to. The Master exposes this as an aspect of vanity that is displeasing to God, and He advises His followers:

"And call no man your father upon the earth: for one is your Father, which is in heaven. Neither be ye called masters: for one is your Master, even Christ. But he that is greatest among you shall be your servant. And whosoever shall exalt him shall be abased; and he that shall humble himself shall be exalted. But woe unto you scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! for ye shut up the kingdom of heaven against men: for ye neither go in yourselves, neither suffer ye them that are entering to go in" (Matthew 23:9-13).

This is harsh judgment of people who are instructing others in spiritual matters, and confusing the issues by teaching error.

"Woe unto you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! for ye devour widows' houses, and for a pretense make long prayer: therefore ye shall receive the greater damnation" (Matthew 23:14).

The Pharisees were sticklers for making tithes of small things; but they were leaving undone the big things of the law: judgment, mercy, faith. He characterized such teachers as "blind guides, which strain at a gnat, and swallow a camel." How often we have seen that happen! He also said they were like whited sepulchers: outwardly beautiful, but inwardly full of dead men's bones and all uncleanness. We should avoid any tendency to esteem chapter 23 too harsh: we should remember these are the words of the Son of God.

Following this harsh indictment there is recorded an expression of the pathetic grief Jesus of Nazareth felt for the city in their blindness:

"O Jerusalem, Jerusalem, thou that killest the prophets, and stonest them which are sent unto thee, how often would I have gathered thy children together, even as a hen gathereth her chickens under her wings, and ye would not! Behold, your house is left unto you desolate" (Matthew 23:37-38).

We read that He sat on a hill where He could look out over Jerusalem and wept. This is the revelation that causes us humbly to turn to God, and to ask Him to graciously keep us walking with Him.

Birthday Of The New Age Matthew 24 & 25

The Bible reveals truth about the world and the whole universe. We have been noting there are really two realms under God. The natural realm (or the natural world) and the spiritual realm (or the spiritual world). Because we can see and can feel the natural world it seems real; sometimes it even seems much more real because we can put our hands on it. But the Gospel reminds believers that the spiritual world is just as real, and it lasts forever. The Bible makes it clear the sentence of death marks all that is in the natural world. The natural creation was made, is now being judged, and will be destroyed.

The Gospel opens the door into the eternal Kingdom which shall never be destroyed. This study focuses attention upon the end of the natural world and the coming of the spiritual Kingdom. In Matthew we have the teaching of Jesus of Nazareth about the end of the world set forth in chapter 24.

"And Jesus went out, and departed from the temple: and his disciples came to him for to show him the buildings of the temple. And Jesus said unto them, See ye not all these things? verily I say unto you, There shall not be left here one stone upon another, that shall not be thrown down" (Matthew 24:1-2).

(Here we see that all that man makes is only temporary).

The new temple being built in the days of Herod was to be more grand than the temple the Jews had. The disciples brought Jesus of Nazareth to see it. "And as he sat upon the mount of Olives, the disciples came unto him, privately, saying, Tell us, when shall these things be? and what shall be the sign of thy coming, and of the end of the world" (Matthew 24:3)? In this inquiry are three questions: when will the destruction of Jerusalem be? what shall be the sign of the return of the Son of God? and what are the signs of the end of the world?

Thinking about the end of the world and the things that have to do with the second coming of the Son of God is an area of interpretation that is most prone to error.

"And Jesus answered and said unto them, Take heed that no man deceive you. For many shall come in my name, saying, I am Christ; and shall deceive many. And ye shall hear of wars and rumors of wars: see that ye be not troubled: for all these things must come to pass, but the end is not yet. For nation shall rise against nation, and kingdom against kingdom: and there shall be famines, and pestilences, and earthquakes, in divers places. All these are the beginning of sorrows" (Matthew 24:4-8).

Such confusion and distress is not the end: in fact it is only the beginning. Because the future has not yet actually happened it is easy for mistakes to be made; and it is characteristic of the human mind that when men talk about anything by way of explaining it, and come to something they do not know, they are prone to imagine what it would be. In the light of this tendency Jesus of Nazareth gave a solemn warning against error.

Despite hostile opposition the Gospel must be preached to all nations (Matthew 24:9-14). This passage reveals that faithful believers, witnesses, will be persecuted; but the message must go out. The times of opposition will be hard to bear, but "he that shall endure unto the end the same will be saved." Calamity shall befall Jerusalem (Matthew 24:15-28). At this time the Roman Empire was enjoying a time of relative peace. There was submission on the part of everybody in the Empire to the Roman rule. Nevertheless there were a number of things that were about to happen, and Jesus of Nazareth refers to them here. There is no doubt this passage declares plainly that Jerusalem shall be destroyed. The fact of history is that it was completely destroyed.

Following this prediction about what would happen to Jerusalem and the people living in Judea at that time, Jesus of Nazareth commented on the return of the Son of Man (Matthew 24:24-31). Various things were said and references were made to what was then predicted would happen. In reading those verses there need be no question in anyone's mind. There is no possible way to read this and come to any other conclusion than that He is coming back. Jesus of Nazareth made it clear that the time of His return would be unannounced. It will be sudden but it will be sure.

In this chapter the Son of God is standing before the people of the world as a spokesman for the Kingdom of God. In speaking about the future, He tells them that God has plans, and that He will carry them out. His plans include the coming again of His Son, the destruction of everything on earth, and the setting up of the everlasting Kingdom. In the latter part of chapter 24 and in chapter 25 the record is here; easy to understand. Four simple but profound parables are recorded with a definite message, and each pointing to something in the future.

Jesus of Nazareth told them plainly that the Son of Man would come, and they should look for Him. The servant who serves Him when His personal presence is not with him, is to be blessed; because when his Lord cometh He will find that servant doing what he was supposed to do. There is a sober warning in the first parable (Matthew 24:42-51), pointing out that human nature is such that if it is not conscious of a time of definite judgment, and is not expecting to be brought to definite judgment, the strong

temptation is to be careless and negligent. Servants should keep their eyes open and look out for the coming of the Lord.

The parable of the ten virgins (Matthew 25:1-13) points plainly to the fact He is coming back. Both groups (the foolish and the wise) believed this and they wanted to be there. They knew there would be need of light, but they, the foolish ones, did not think the bridegroom was coming at that time and so they did not put oil in their lamps. The wise were ready in case He came, which He did at midnight. The wise refused to give oil to the foolish ones, and while these were gone to get the oil the bridegroom came. They that were ready went in with him to the marriage: and the door was shut. Afterwards came also the other virgins, saying, "Lord, Lord, open to us. But he answered and said, Verily I say unto you, I know you not." On the basis of this parable the Master warned: "Watch therefore, for ye know neither the day nor the hour wherein the Son of man cometh." There need not be the slightest doubt about what the Bible teaches: He is coming again to this world.

The parable of the talents is told in Matthew 25:14-30. When I read this sober message I should remember that the persons involved in this particular parable were all men who in a sense knew their Lord. One got five talents because he could handle it, another got two talents because he could handle that, and still another got one talent. When their reports were given on the basis of what had happened, the one who had five gained five, and was approved; the one who had two gained two, and was approved; then the one who gained nothing came with an alibi. He said he was afraid he would make a mistake and be judged. And that is just what happened to him: he was judged: what he had was taken away from him and given to someone else. The Master definitely taught there would be a judgment.

The parable of the sheep and the goats takes up the remainder of chapter 25. Acts of charity carried on by human beings do make a difference. In the parable those who were responsive to the appeals of charity were in one group (called sheep), and those who did not respond to the appeals of charity were in another group (called goats). The Son of God said to those who had done His will: "Come, ye blessed of my Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world" (Matthew 25:34). Those people had the revelation of the Law of God. They knew all of the various things that were in the ritual, the worship of God, and from that they received the idea that God was merciful and kind. They were inwardly moved to be merciful and thus to respond to God. This would show up in the fact that they would do things for others. And now Jesus of Nazareth says, "Come, ye blessed of my Father." They were blessed of God, enabling them to obey the guidance which they received. It would seem those folks were not yet born again people, because these things happened before the time of the cross and before Pentecost. All this could have been true back in Old Testament days. There was enough revealed then about God to trust Him. Now these people are actually called in to share in the blessing of God. The charity they exercised qualified them to receive the Kingdom.

In these four parables we see four ideas that follow each other in logical order. The first parable indicates the wise servant: look for the Lord, He is coming back. The second parable about the ten virgins teaches a sober warning: He is coming back, be ready; the third parable about the talents teaches He will judge; be sure you are prepared to give a good report; and the last parable of the sheep and the goats teaches the Lord will separate; see to it that you respond to the revelation from God, as much as you know of it, and be willing to do God's will.

The New King - Crucified!

Matthew 26&27

The Bible tells of the coming of Jesus Christ the Son of God into the world to seek and to save the lost. He came to die for sinners, to give His life a ransom for many. It is in this revelation of Him that the truth comes out: the way salvation is provided is by bringing the individual soul into fellowship and relationship with the Lord Jesus Christ who will rule in that individual's soul. In that way this believer enters into the Kingdom of God through the Lord Jesus Christ. Such entrance into the Kingdom of God is possible only by way of the cross. To be saved by Christ the believer must identify himself with Jesus Christ and Him crucified; God will then raise him from the dead even as Christ was raised. Into his born again soul God sends the Holy Spirit to activate in the yielded believer the will of the living Lord so that he finds in himself an ambition to always be well pleasing to God.

Perhaps it cannot be too strongly emphasized that entrance into the Kingdom of God is by way of the new birth. The ways of the Kingdom are all new to the believer. The inner urge to do the will of God must come from the Holy Spirit who is in the believer. The outward pattern of conduct that is to be consistent with the inward conviction is to be seen in the actions of Jesus of Nazareth.

In the Gospel of Matthew there is an account of events that occurred as the Son of God encountered sinful men in the natural world. Chapter 26 gives a simple account of the fact that the chief priests, the scribes and the elders, consulted that they might take Jesus by subtlety and kill Him. In the first five verses there is the account of a plan afoot to put Jesus of Nazareth to death. Matthew 26:6-13 records one of the sweetest stories in the New Testament: the anointing of Jesus of Nazareth by Mary of Bethany. The significance of this event can be simply stated in this way: she took the very best she had and brought it to her Lord personally as a gift. That is the way to serve Him - taking the very best and bringing it to Him personally as a gift. The story goes on to show the effect of her deed. The disciples thought she had overdone things and they criticized her. Why didn't she spend the money on the poor? Jesus of Nazareth said to His disciples: "Leave her alone. She hath wrought a good work upon me. She hath anointed my body to the burying." Mary of Bethany knew that He was her Savior and that He would offer Himself as a sacrifice on her behalf, and this was why she did what she did.

Mary apparently did not realize that this action on her part was so impressive that Jesus of Nazareth would say that anywhere the Gospel was preached this should be told. Then why did she want to do this? She loved Him; this is that Mary who sat at His feet and heard His words. In his first epistle John tells us we love Him because He first loved us: Mary of Bethany recognized that He was going to give Himself for sinning people because of His grace and mercy.

While this event was happening there occurred one of the ugliest experiences Jesus of Nazareth ever had to endure. One of His own apostles, Judas, decided to betray Him. The deterioration of this man is now complete. He was originally a believer, one of those chosen to present the Gospel to the world; but in the course of time the enemy had put into his heart the idea of selling out his Lord and Master. Now he decides to do it.

Matthew 26:17-25 records the incident of the Lord's Supper. Here it is recorded that Jesus of Nazareth prepared this Passover Feast and brought the disciples together that they might share it. Their Lord was heavy hearted, and confided "One of you shall betray me." Each in turn asked, "Lord, is it I?" This is an indication of the humility of these men. It is worthy of note that no one suspected Judas. This man loved money and wanted to have it apart from having earned it. Also at that last supper Jesus of Nazareth instituted the sacrament of communion. Matthew 26:26-30 records how He set the pattern of

the sacrament of communion: a pattern that is maintained among His followers to this day. Believers vary in procedure about the bread and about the cup but the general pattern is the same everywhere in the world: the bread and the wine representing the body and the blood of the Lord Jesus Christ.

At that time Jesus of Nazareth predicted what they would do when He was taken away. He made the remark: "All ye shall be offended because of me this night" (Matthew 26:31). Peter spoke up and said in effect: "Not me. I'll not be doing that." But his Lord told him he would deny Him three times before the night was over. Peter protested to Him: "If I were to die, I would not deny thee." But we know that he did. Matthew 26:36-46 tells the story of Gethsemane, the most sacred event in all Scripture. Jesus of Nazareth on that night, after being alone with His disciples, withdrew, and went a little further, taking with Him. Peter, James and John. He went into the Garden of Gethsemane and began to pray. The record is He "began to be sorrowful and very heavy." He had gone on from where the three were, falling on His face on the ground, and saying to His Father, "O my Father, if it be possible, let this cup pass from me: nevertheless not as I will, but as thou wilt" (Matthew 26:39). I cannot think the Lord Jesus Christ would have been disturbed by the idea of His body dying a physical death. He knew He was not going to stay dead: that in three days He would be raised from the dead. There is more involved here than I know - something so significant that it caused the Son of God to sweat as it were great drops of blood. I am inclined to think that something is implied here, that indicates the Son of God was to be separated from His Father, which had not happened in eternity. This was intolerable for the Son to face; but He did face it and we read in one place He almost died and an angel strengthened Him. When I think about that from the standpoint of praying, I think for myself that the request of Jesus of Nazareth "take this cup from me if it be possible" was one thing, but the prayer He offered would be this: "nevertheless not as I will, but as thou wilt." We may come into the presence of God and request what is on our hearts; but when we actually come to ask, let us ask in His will. The disciples had fallen asleep and the Lord Jesus took that occasion to bring to their minds the idea that even though in spirit they would want to follow Him, in flesh they could be weak.

Matthew 26:47-56 tells the sad story of His betrayal, when He was arrested and forsaken, and taken into the High Priest's court. Verses 57 to 68 give the account of Jesus of Nazareth standing in the court of the High Priest and being accused of blasphemy because He claimed that God was His Father. In the Jewish law blasphemy was punishable by death; and they wanted to put Him to death. The Roman government did not permit the local courts to have the power to put anyone to death, so the Jewish leaders brought Jesus of Nazareth before the Roman governor, Pontius Pilate; where He could be accused of treason, a crime punishable by death.

Matthew 27:3-10 records that Judas Iscariot hanged himself. From this we learn that to know what is right and what to do, is not enough: one must do it. Although Judas knew Jesus Christ he did not commit himself fully to Him as Lord; and he actually was led into doing something he did not originally want to do.

In Pilate's court Jesus of Nazareth was asked: "Art thou the King of the Jews" (Matthew 27:11)? He admitted it. One of the other Gospels report that He told Pilate, "My kingdom is not of this world." Pilate tried to find a way to avoid condemning Him, but was unsuccessful. In fact he offered Barabbas as a substitute but the people would not be changed in their united attitude. They did not want pardon for Jesus of Nazareth. Then Pilate asked: "What shall I do then with Jesus which is called Christ" (Matthew 27:22)? The mob told Pilate to crucify Him. The story of the crucifixion (Matthew 27:26-38) shows how Jesus of Nazareth was treated with the customary cruelty that was usually given to a common criminal. I am appalled to this day when I think: the Heavens were silent! God saw all that was

happening!!

In Matthew 27:39-54 the death itself is described. Here we see how He was mocked by callous onlookers. There was darkness over the whole land from the sixth hour until the ninth hour - from noon until three o'clock in the afternoon. When He died there was an earthquake. It had such an affect upon the Roman centurion that he said: "Truly this was the Son of God" (Matthew 27:54). When we read that sad story we can feel all those things that happened, and we notice with appreciation the faithful women standing by looking on.

This is the account of how the Son of God, who came to seek and to save the lost, who came to His own and was rejected, was put to death and died. Matthew 27:57-60 tells the wonderful story of Joseph of Arimathea, a rich young man who really believed in the Son of God but who did not openly confess. When everybody turned against Jesus of Nazareth and agreed to put Him to death, Joseph of Arimathea came out into the open and requested the body. In so doing he identified himself with his Lord. He was actually a believer and this crisis brought it out into the open.

This is the record then of the closing days and finally the betrayal, arrest and trial in the High Priest's court, where He was condemned for blasphemy and in Pilate's court, where He was condemned for treason. In all of this He was the King of Kings and the Lord of Lords. But that truth was not recognized nor was it revealed at that time. Everything was hidden and it looked as though everything had been lost. This is the dark hour of the Gospel story.

The Dawn Of The New Age

Matthew 28

In our last study we turned our attention to the darkest hour of history, and in our present study we will look into the brightest light that ever shown in this world. Here we shall look into the resurrection of Jesus Christ. The Kingdom of God in the person of Jesus of Nazareth suffered violence in this world, but now in His resurrection the Kingdom is made manifest in glory. The New Kingdom, or if you will call it the New Age, is not something for this world; it is not something improved in the organization of society of mankind. The New Kingdom is another way of living: different from this world. When Pilate asked Him if He was the king, Jesus of Nazareth told him:

"My kingdom is not of this world: if my kingdom were of this world, then would my servants fight, that I should not be delivered to the Jews: but now is my kingdom not from hence" (John 18:36).

To understand the things of the Kingdom of God one needs to remember the great difference between earth and Heaven, flesh and spirit; and in that sense we can speak of the "old," which has to do with our life in the flesh, being ex- changed for the "new," which has to do with the life of the believer in the spirit. It is here we can understand what is meant when the "first" age and the "second" age are spoken about. In studying the event of the resurrection of Jesus Christ we are looking at the dawn of the new manifestation of the Kingdom of God. It is the Kingdom that is dawning, not a new day for this world. It is a new day for any believer.

"In the end of the sabbath, as it began to dawn toward the first day of the week, came Mary Magdalene and the other Mary to see the sepulcher" (Matthew 28:1).

This was after the time of the Passover. One reason why the Jewish leaders wanted Jesus of Nazareth

to be tried in Pilate's court on the day before the Passover, was because His death could be accomplished and handled before the Passover. He was brought into the court of the High Priest during the night before the Passover because it was against Jewish custom to hold a court session on the Passover day. So in the early hours of that morning they held a hastily convened session of the High Priest's court, and had Jesus of Nazareth brought before the High Priest. He was accused of blasphemy during the night so that He could be condemned before the Passover. The Romans paid no attention to the Passover; Pilate went ahead and held his court on the Passover day.

It is important to remember that the women who came to the tomb had no idea of what was going to happen. They came to see how things were and to help in any way they could.

"And, behold, there was a great earthquake: for the angel of the Lord descended from heaven, and came and rolled back the stone from the door, and sat upon it" (Matthew 28:2).

In another Gospel we read that when the women were coming toward the grave, one asked the other who would take away the stone, because it was a large one. The women would not be able to move it, so they wondered who would take away the stone. But Matthew records that in an earthquake the angel of the Lord rolled the stone back. An angel was still there when they came.

"His countenance was like lightning, and his raiment white as snow: and for fear of him the keepers did shake" (Matthew 28:3-4).

Some will say this was just the imagination of the women who were emotionally excited; but such would not be the case of those Roman soldiers. The report is "they did shake and became as dead men."

I emphasize this because I should always show my personal confidence in the supernatural character of the Gospel of the Lord Jesus Christ, which brings me into touch with God in Heaven. My consciousness is brought into the very presence of God who will manifest and establish Himself in my awareness and in my consciousness, by doing some things that are absolutely beyond the natural. That is what I am to understand. So I need this.

This is what gives the believer confidence when he goes to the funeral of a loved one. When he stands at the open grave, and into that grave are placed the remains of a loved one he must understand that there was a time when an angel of God came from Heaven, rolled back a big stone from the mouth of a cave, sat on it and talked to the women. More than that is true: the invisible things of God are real and his faith deals in those things - in the things that have to do with God.

"And the angel answered and said unto the women, Fear not ye: for I know that ye seek Jesus, which was crucified" (Matthew 28:5).

I should pause and take time to reflect. They had not said anything, but that angel knew what was in their hearts and mind. And so I am to think that even now, as I live and go about my affairs, there are angels in Heaven who know what I have in mind. I am not sure they know everything, but this angel knew what was in their minds. "Fear not ye: for I know that ye seek Jesus, which was crucified."

The angel used only the name "Jesus." He did not give Jesus of Nazareth a title. Jesus of Nazareth was later going to be made "Christ," as Peter would say in the Book of Acts (Acts 2:36), but just now they were looking for Jesus of Nazareth, which was crucified. "He is not here: for he is risen, as he said. Come, see the place where the Lord lay" (Matthew 28:6). That may not seem very exciting as it is

written by Matthew, but now let us turn to the Gospel of John:

"Peter therefore went forth, and that other disciple, and came to the sepulcher. So they ran both together: and the other disciple did outrun Peter, and came first to the sepulcher. And he stooping down, and looking in, saw the linen clothes lying; yet went he not in. Then cometh Simon Peter following him, and went into the sepulcher, and seeth the linen clothes lie, and the napkin, that was about his head, not lying with the linen clothes, but wrapped together in a place by itself" (John 20:3-7).

That is astonishing! Why would the Holy Spirit take this occasion to draw attention to the fact that the napkin which had been around His head was folded, put away in another place? When Jesus of Nazareth woke up alive He took the napkin off His head and laid it aside. Think about that! I want to note the different ways in which those disciples were being persuaded that the body of Jesus Christ had actually been raised from the dead. The body was not just taken away somewhere: the clothes were left behind.

When the disciples had been told to come and see the place where the Lord lay, the angel had said:

"Go quickly, and tell his disciples that he is risen from the dead; and, behold, he goeth before you into Galilee; there shall ye see him: lo, I have told you" (Matthew 28:7).

This was the message. How marvelous it must have been when they went back to tell the other disciples that Jesus was alive!

"And they departed quickly from the sepulcher with fear and great joy; and did run to bring his disciples word. And as they went to tell his disciples, behold, Jesus met them, saying, All hail. And they came and held him by the feet, and worshipped him" (Matthew 28:8-9).

Until now they had not met Him: they had met the angel; but now He met them, saying, "All hail." And they worshipped Him. Then said Jesus unto them (and we will do well to keep in mind our context here. This is Mary Magdalene and the other Mary who came to see the sepulcher):

"Be not afraid: go tell my brethren that they go into Galilee, and there shall they see me. Now when they were going, behold, some of the watch (the soldiers) came into the city, and showed unto the chief priests all the things that were done. And when they were assembled with the elders, and had taken counsel, they gave large money unto the soldiers, saying, Say ye, His disciples came by night, and stole him away while we slept" (Matthew 28:10-13).

So far as those Romans were concerned they were actually there on the spot, but there is no record that any of them ever said that the body of Jesus Christ was still there. Apparently the body was gone, and so they made up this story:

"Say ye, His disciples came by night, and stole him away while we slept. And if this come to the governor's ears, we will persuade him, and secure you. So they took the money, and did as they were taught: and this saying is commonly reported among the Jews until this day" (Matthew 28:14-15).

This means it was commonly reported in the day the book of Matthew was written. Luke and John tell more about what happened in the next forty days.

"Then the eleven disciples went away into Galilee, into a mountain where Jesus had appointed them. And when they saw him, they worshipped him: but some doubted" (Matthew 28:16-17).

Can you believe that? There are some today who hear about the Gospel and are affected by it, but deep down in their own hearts, they still do not really believe these things were so.

"And Jesus came and spake unto them, saying, All power is given unto me in heaven and in earth" (Matthew 28:18).

Sometimes we as believers are inclined to forget. What do you think was in the minds of the disciples? I suspect it was: "Jesus is alive!!" That means that all He ever promised is true, and all He ever talked about will come to pass. So we ask ourselves again: What occupied the minds of those early disciples when the women came from the grave and told them the body of Jesus was not there? Then He is alive! Everything He promised will come to pass!

There is no intimation here they had the world order in mind, or any social problems in mind. The Kingdom does not begin in the context of social affairs of men, but in relation to the soul and God.

"Go ye therefore, and teach all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost" (Matthew 28:19).

I think the meaning of "baptizing them" is preaching the message, and filling their hearts with the message of the Father, Son and Holy Ghost. What aspect of God is the Father? He begets us. We are born by the grace of God; He is the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ and He is our Heavenly Father because we have been born again in Him. "And of the Son" - what is the message there? The Son of God came into the world to seek and to save the lost; He came to give His life a ransom for many. He died for us and because He is the Son we are in Him and we are also the sons of God. "And of the Holy Ghost." The truth about the Holy Ghost is that God has come to be with men, to dwell in men. The indwelling of the power of God in the Holy Spirit is the dynamic that causes all the affairs of the Kingdom to happen. So they were to preach this and everywhere they were to bring people under the influence of this message:

"Teaching them to observe all things whatsoever I have commanded you: and lo, I am with you always, even unto the end of the world" (Matthew 28:20).

My father-in-law emphasized to me that when the Lord Jesus says He is with me always, this does not mean He follows behind me. He asked me, "Why not think He is beside you, and you are walking with Him? Or perhaps He is even before you, going first." Thus we are brought to feel the very essence of the Kingdom of God. What makes the Kingdom of God what it is? Paul told the Colossian Christians: "Christ in you, the hope of glory." And this is it. We remember how the Lord Jesus said: "My Kingdom is not of this world." It is not a construction of human affairs in social manner; nothing like that. "My Kingdom is all of that which is under my control - where I am, in whom I am, among whom I live, in whom I live and through whom I do my work. Christ in you, the hope of glory."