

The Teaching of CHRIST

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PART III

THE TEACHING OF CHRIST CONCERNING THE KINGDOM OF GOD

CHAPTER THIRTEEN

DIFFERENT PHASES OF THE ONE FACT

“From that time Jesus began to preach, and to say, Repent: for the kingdom of heaven is at hand” (Matthew 4:17).

"Blessed are the poor in spirit: for theirs is the kingdom of heaven” (Matthew 5:3).

"Blessed are they which are persecuted for righteousness' sake: for theirs is the kingdom of heaven” (Matthew 5:10).

"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” (Matthew 5:19).

“Thy kingdom come” (Matthew 6:10).

“But seek ye first the kingdom of God, and his righteousness; and all these things shall be added unto you” (Matthew 6:33).

“And as ye go, preach, saying, The kingdom of heaven is at hand” (Matthew 10:7).

"And from the days of John the Baptist until now the kingdom of heaven suffereth violence, and the violent take it by force” (Matthew 11:12).

“But if I cast out devils by the Spirit of God, then the kingdom of God is come unto you” (Matthew 12:28).

“The Son of man shall send forth his angels, and they shall gather out of his kingdom all things that offend, and them which do iniquity; And shall cast them into a furnace of fire:

there shall be wailing and gnashing of teeth. Then shall the righteous shine forth as the sun in the kingdom of their Father. Who hath ears to hear, let him hear” (Matthew 13:41-43).

“Then said he unto them, Therefore every scribe which is instructed unto the kingdom of heaven is like unto a man that is an householder, which bringeth forth out of his treasure things new and old” (Matthew 13:52).

“And I will give unto thee the keys of the kingdom of heaven: and whatsoever thou shalt bind on earth shall be bound in heaven: and whatsoever thou shalt loose on earth shall be loosed in heaven” (Matthew 16:19).

“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 18:3).

“Therefore say I unto you, The kingdom of God shall be taken from you, and given to a nation bringing forth the fruits thereof” (Matthew 21:43).

“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 23:13).

“And if thine eye offend thee, pluck it out: it is better for thee to enter into the kingdom of God with one eye, than having two eyes to be cast into hell fire” (Mark 9:47)

“And heal the sick that are therein, and say unto them, The kingdom of God is come nigh unto you. But into whatsoever city ye enter, and they receive you not, go your ways out into the streets of the same, and say, Even the very dust of your city, which cleaveth on us, we do wipe off against you: notwithstanding be ye sure of this, that the kingdom of God is come nigh unto you” (Luke 10:9-11).

“Fear not, little flock; for it is your Father's good pleasure to give you the kingdom” (Luke 12:32)

“The law and the prophets were until John: since that time the kingdom of God is preached, and every man presseth into it” (Luke 16:16).

“Neither shall they say, Lo here! or, lo there! for, behold, the kingdom of God is within you” (Luke 17:21)

“Jesus answered and said unto him, Verily, verily, I say unto thee, Except a man be born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God. Nicodemus saith unto him, How can a man be born when he is old? can he enter the second time into his mother's womb, and be born? Jesus answered, Verily, verily, I say unto thee, Except a man be born of water and of the Spirit, he cannot enter into the kingdom of God” (John 3:3-5).

“Jesus answered, 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).

LET us now consider some phases of the one inclusive fact of the Kingdom of GOD suggested by the phrases which our Lord used when referring to it. His first recorded reference to the Kingdom was in His conversation with Nicodemus. His last recorded reference to the Kingdom was in His conversation with Pilate. These are at least interesting and suggestive facts. Both these conversations are found in the Gospel according to John: and indeed, they are only found there; and yet further, they are the only occurrences of the word Kingdom in that Gospel.

Between these conversations the word was constantly upon His lips, as the idea was ever in His mind; and so varied were His references and declarations that sometimes they seem to be contradictory. It would not be at all difficult for anyone, who was so disposed, to set down one thing our Master said, upon one occasion, concerning the Kingdom; and opposite it something He said upon another occasion, apparently in direct opposition. To take a simple illustration. He declared, **“Then shall the righteous shine forth as the sun in the kingdom of their Father”** (Matthew 13:43).

Upon another occasion He said, **“The kingdom of God cometh not with observation”** (Luke 17:20).

I am not proposing now to deal with that apparent contradiction. I but refer to it. As a matter of fact all these seeming contradictions must be considered in their relationship to His whole conception of the Kingdom; and being so considered, they will be found to reveal different aspects of the Kingdom as He understood it, and as He came to reveal it.

At the commencement of these studies will be found a table of the references which our Lord made to the Kingdom, set out, so far as I am able, in chronological order. A glance at this table will show that in the brief report of the words of JESUS preserved for us, there are at least sixty-two references to the Kingdom, and His employment of different phrases with regard thereto is in itself a matter of very great interest. I propose to select those which give distinct ideas, and then to indicate the unification of these ideas in the Person, and in the mission of our Lord.

The boundaries of suggestion are to be found in His first and final references to the Kingdom.

The first reference was made to Nicodemus in the words, **“ Verily, verily, I say unto thee, Except a man be born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God”** (John 3:3).

It was a striking introduction, general and inclusive. He made use of a phrase that was current in Rabbinical teaching, and that was not unknown in the Scriptures of the old economy; and immediately connected that common phrase with an idea, strangely new and mystical to the mind of the man who listened. About the **“Kingdom of God”** Nicodemus knew much, or thought he did; but when the Master declared that no man can see it, unless he be born from above, a new and strange idea was presented to his mind.

Nicodemus had come to Him devoutly, honestly, and sincerely, himself a teacher in Israel, earnestly desiring to know the last thing GOD had to say to men. He believed that the GOD of his fathers, Who had spoken to them in divers portions and divers methods in the past, had through JESUS something else to say, something more to communicate: **“We know that Thou art a Teacher come from God”** (John 3:2). He had come to listen to the added line, the new precept, the little more; and our Master took the whole conception of Hebraism, and expressed it in the opening phrase, **“the Kingdom of God,”** and then said to the ruler and the teacher, No man can see it unless he be born anew. The idea of the Kingdom in its entirety lay within that opening word, and it was accompanied by a revelation of our Master's conception of man's condition. A man is unable to see the Kingdom, cannot know it, save as he receives some mystic gift of life from above; the result of the reception of which will be a vision of the Kingdom, and an understanding of its true meaning.

The last declaration was made at the close of the long ministry, in that wonderful word which our Lord spoke in the presence of the Roman procurator, **“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).

This is an equally striking conclusion.

- If the first word was general and inclusive, the final word was particular and corrective.
- If the first word indicated the fact that for the seeing of the Kingdom there must be some communication of Heavenly life, the last word indicated the fact that for the realization of the Kingdom, material forces and policies are of no avail.

The rule of Heaven over the world is My Kingdom; My Kingdom is not of the cosmos, does not depend upon the things that are in it. My Kingdom is the reign and rule of Heaven over the cosmos. The results at which; have been aiming will never be realized by armies or policies; not hence is My Kingdom.

There stood the Master face to face with the symbol and embodiment in a man, of the greatest power of government in the world; all the Roman Empire was represented in Pilate, and to him JESUS said, Not hence is My Kingdom; not by these methods is it to be established.

The boundaries of suggestion then are:

- First, that whatever He meant by the Kingdom, no man can see it, save as he receive new life from above; and
- Secondly, that whatever He meant by the Kingdom, it can never be realized in human history, by human policies, and human cleverness.

All His teaching is bounded by these two great principles.

Now let us glance over what lies between that first declaration and that final affirmation, and taking all these references attempt to summarize them, and to deduce from them their values.

There are five things which our Lord's references to the Kingdom make perfectly clear.

He declared first that the Kingdom of GOD is that into which men must enter. There is a sense in which all men and all angels and all devils are in the Kingdom of GOD, and can never escape from His Kingship. But there is a sense in which men are outside, and there must be, on their part, a definite act of entrance.

In the second place His teaching proclaimed the fact that the Kingdom of GOD came to men, when He came to men.

In the third place His teaching revealed the fact that the Kingdom of GOD is the inheritance of those who enter in, and submit to the rule of GOD.

In the fourth place He showed that the Kingdom of GOD is that for which the subjects, entering in, become responsible in all the affairs of this life.

And Finally, He taught that the Kingdom of GOD is that which will be established in the world by processes leading up to a definite crisis.

That is to summarize quite briefly the result of an examination of the phrases which our Lord used, rather than to consider carefully any particular and specific teaching.

He declared that the Kingdom of GOD is that into which men must enter. He treated men as being outside that Kingdom; and He was perfectly clear in His teaching concerning the way by which they may enter the Kingdom. He declared that the first necessity for entrance is new life in the second word He spoke to Nicodemus, "**Verily, verily, I say unto thee, Except a man be born of water and of the Spirit, he cannot enter into the kingdom of God**" (John 3:5).

He revealed the conditions upon which men may have life, and so enter into the Kingdom; the intellectual condition: "**And from the days of John the Baptist until now the kingdom of heaven suffereth violence, and the violent take it by force**" (Matthew 11:12).

Or as He said upon another occasion, "**The law and the prophets were until John: since that time the kingdom of God is preached, and every man presseth into it**" (Luke 16:16).

A careful examination of these two in their mutual light will show that our Lord was speaking as to intellectual difficulty, to men who could not understand the methods He was adopting. His methods for the establishment of His Kingdom are as alien to the philosophies of the hour, as they were to the intellectual apprehension of John the Baptist; but He will establish His Kingdom by His own method, which is the only method. Therefore a man must be prepared to do violence to all his own wit and wisdom and cleverness, and be assured that the method of preaching the Gospel to the poor, and healing the sick, and opening blind eyes, and refusing to gather an army, and failing to call together a parliament, are the real methods of the Kingdom; - individual preaching of a truth, insistence upon the importance of truth, the perpetual, quiet, and personal propaganda from man to man, the creation of the new social order by the regeneration of the individuals that make up the social order.

He also revealed the emotional condition for entering.

"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 18:3).

Until a man shall go back to childhood, and to the spirit of a little child, which is the spirit of simplicity, of conscious and confessed imperfection, of plasticity; unless a man get back emotionally to that point, and is willing to take that position, he cannot enter into the Kingdom.

He revealed, moreover, in startling language, in terms that thrill and almost thunder in severity, the volitional necessity: **"If thine eye offend thee, pluck it out: it is better for thee to enter into the kingdom of God with one eye, than having two eyes to be cast into hell fire"** (Mark 9:47).

The conception was always that of having to enter in, and the intellectual and the emotional and the volitional values were clearly revealed. The Kingdom is that into which a man must enter, and must enter by a process, by revolution rather than evolution.

But in the second place - and here is the note of hope, and here is the light and the glory of the teaching of JESUS - His words reveal the fact that He conceived of the Kingdom of GOD as that which had come to men. Such was His unvarying proclamation.

It was the key-note of His own preaching, **"From that time Jesus began to preach, and to say, Repent: for the kingdom of heaven is at hand"** (Matthew 4:17).

It was the key-note of His commission to the twelve, **"And as ye go, preach, saying, The kingdom of heaven is at hand"** (Matthew 10:7).

It was the claim He made when His enemies charged Him with casting out demons by the power of Beelzebub, **"If I cast out devils by the Spirit of God, then the kingdom of God is come unto you"** (Matthew 12:28).

It was the key-note of His commission to the seventy, **"Heal the sick that are therein, and say unto them, The kingdom of God is come nigh unto you. But into whatsoever city ye enter, and they receive you not, go your ways out into the streets of the same, and say, Even the very dust of your city, which cleaveth on us, we do wipe off against you: notwithstanding be ye sure of this, that the kingdom of God is come nigh unto you"** (Luke 10:9-11).

Finally when enforcing His claim in answer to the criticism of the Pharisees He said, **"Neither shall they say, Lo here! or, lo there! for, behold, the kingdom of God is within you"** (Luke 17:21), that is, in the midst of you.

That is one of the passages upon which philosophies unwarranted by the teaching of JESUS have been built. There are those who tell us that the passage means that our Lord said that in every man there is the Kingdom of GOD, and it only needs developing. That was not the intention. The

context sweeps the idea away. The Kingdom of GOD was in the midst of them because He was in the midst of them, revealing its purpose, its powers, and its passion. This statement was a claim for Himself, and not a description of human nature. From beginning to end of His ministry He declared that the Kingdom of GOD was nigh at hand.

Two things then have we so far seen;

- First that men must enter the Kingdom by way of change, by revolution; and
- Secondly, that He had brought the Kingdom close to men in order that they might enter in.

The third phase of suggestion made by these phrases of our Lord is that the Kingdom of GOD is the inheritance of the subjects thereof.

Three illustrations will suffice; the opening beatitude, "**Blessed are the poor in spirit: for theirs is the kingdom of heaven**" (Matthew 5:3), the closing beatitude, "**Blessed are they which are persecuted for righteousness' sake: for theirs is the kingdom of heaven**" (Matthew 5:10) and when speaking to His own disciples, repeating to them some parts of the Manifesto on another occasion, and in a different place, He gave utterance to these wonderful words, "**Fear not, little flock; for it is your Father's good pleasure to give you the kingdom**" (Luke 12:32).

The idea suggested by these words of CHRIST is that men entering into the Kingdom He has brought nigh become citizens of that Kingdom. There is conferred upon them the freedom of the city of GOD. They are now made participants in all the values of that Kingdom. They enter, in order to possess it. Those who are poor in spirit, and who therefore enter into the Kingdom He has brought nigh, entering in are not there on sufferance. "**No more strangers and foreigners, but fellowcitizens with the saints, and of the household of God**" (Ephesians 2:19).

And ultimately to those who enter in, the Kingdom is given in perfection. "**Fear not, little flock; for it is your Father's good pleasure to give you the kingdom**" (Luke 12:32).

That is a picture of the ultimate democracy, but it is democracy realizing itself under the supreme and vital government of the absolute monarchy of our Lord and Saviour JESUS CHRIST. Those who enter the Kingdom possess it, all its riches are theirs, all its privileges belong to them.

The fourth phase of suggestion resulting from these phrases of our Lord is that the Kingdom of GOD is that for which its subjects become responsible.

Nothing is more patent than this in the study of the words of JESUS. Mark His instructions as they are found in the Manifesto, in the parables, and notably at the great confession at Caesarea Philippi.

In the course of the Manifesto He said as to their teaching: "**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**" (Matthew 5:19).

He commanded them to pray for the coming of the Kingdom in the words "**Our Father which art in heaven, Hallowed be thy name. Thy kingdom come. Thy will be done in earth, as it is in heaven**" (Matthew 6:9-10).

And He called them to effort for the coming of the Kingdom in the words, "**Seek ye first the kingdom of God, and his righteousness; and all these things shall be added unto you**" (Matthew 6:33).

Thus those entering the Kingdom He has brought nigh, and sharing its privileges are made responsible for that Kingdom in the world.

His parabolic teaching, recorded specially in the thirteenth chapter of Matthew, was in part delivered to the multitudes and in part in private to the disciples. He ended that teaching by asking His own disciples, "**Have ye understood all these things?**" And they said "**Yea, Lord.**" Then said He, "**Therefore every scribe which is instructed unto the kingdom of heaven is like unto a man that is an householder, which bringeth forth out of his treasure things new and old**" (Matthew 13:51, 52).

Thus the final parable revealed their responsibility. Because they were scribes, instructed to the Kingdom of Heaven, they occupied the position of householders, who were responsible to bring out of their treasure-house things new and old.

At Caesarea Philippi Peter made his great confession and our Lord indicated this fact of responsibility in one phase of illustration concerning His Church. Not only did He say, "**I will build My Church**"; not only "**the gates of Hades shall not prevail against it**"; but also, "**I will give unto thee the keys of the kingdom of heaven: and whatsoever thou shalt bind on earth shall be bound in heaven: and whatsoever thou shalt loose on earth shall be loosed in heaven**" (Matthew 16:19). I will give unto thee the insignia of moral authority in the world. The keys are the symbols of an ethical responsibility resting upon all disciples of the Kingdom.

Thus our Lord indicated in His Manifesto, in His parabolic teaching, and at the crisis of Peter's confession, the truth that those who enter into the Kingdom which He brings near to men, and who by such entrance do possess for themselves the Kingdom are responsible in the world for the revelation of that Kingdom, and its proclamation to men.

This is even more solemnly revealed by words He addressed to the rulers of the ancient people, and to the city itself. "**I say unto you, The kingdom of God shall be taken from you, and given to a nation bringing forth the fruits thereof**" (Matthew 21:43).

That doom was pronounced because that nation had failed to fulfill its Kingdom responsibility in the world.

The same truth is yet more clearly, vividly, terribly stated in the final woes pronounced upon the rulers, "**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 23:13).

All these words addressed to His disciples, and woes pronounced upon the rulers of the time, reveal the same principle: that if we enter the Kingdom which He brings near, and share its privileges, its responsibilities rest upon us.

Finally, the teaching of our Lord revealed the fact that the Kingdom of GOD on earth is to be established by processes leading to, and culminating in a crisis. All the Kingdom parables teach this. The process is that of the introduction of certain elements through individual souls into the world spirit and the world atmosphere; the introduction of principles; the sowing of the good seed.

These parables reveal also the fact of development; the development of opposing forces and principles to full manifestation; the development of the good seed, first the blade, and then the ear, and then the full corn in the ear; the growth from the seed to the harvest of wheat; the growth to absolute and final development and manifestation of darnel.

There are some people who say: Do you not think the world is getting better? Oh, yes, very much better every day! But others say, Do you not think it is getting very much worse? Yes, very much worse every day! That is exactly the teaching of JESUS; and the man who only sees that it is getting worse does not see as his Master saw; and the man who only sees it getting better, sees very little. Accept it or reject it, this was clearly His teaching. He may have been mistaken, this Teacher of two millenniums ago.

For the moment we are dealing only with what He said. The process is one of development; development in which evil is wrought out to its ultimate and most terrible issue and manifestation; development in which good, the good He brought into human history, is wrought out to its final manifestation.

And how will the process end? Not by wheat gaining a victory over darnel, or by darnel driving all wheat out of the field of the world! It will end by a crisis in human history, clear, definite, sharp: a crisis in which evil is to be destroyed and swept out of the world, and good is to be brought to its final realization and its ultimate triumph. Not by a crisis alone, but by a process ending in a crisis! Not by a process alone, but by a crisis prepared for by a process!

The teaching of our Lord and His apostles concerning His second advent as constituting the crisis is perfectly clear, and there can be no greater difficulty in believing that, than in believing the fact of the first advent. The second is no more wonderful a crisis than the first. GOD's method has always been that of process leading to crisis, the crisis initiating a new movement forward, until the glorious consummation.

Thus our Lord declared that this Kingdom, to which He made such constant reference, men must enter; He came to bring it near; men entering become citizens thereof; becoming citizens they are responsible for its principles, its revelation, and its operations; and that it will come by processes of development which will go forward until an hour of crisis, when He will appear a second time, definitely taking action; and the Kingdom will be established.

All these phases revealed by His phrases are unified in Himself. In the boundaries of suggestion He first declared that life is the first necessity for vision, and proceeded to show Nicodemus how He had come to give that life. In the final affirmation He declared to Pilate that not by the methods of this world can His Kingdom come, but that He had come to proclaim truth, and that by the victory of truth the Kingdom must come, Entrance to the Kingdom is made possible by Himself.

He it is Who has brought the Kingdom nigh to men. He bestows its gifts, and administers its resources. He directs its responsible services. His own advent is to create the crisis when evil is to be destroyed, and the Kingdom is to be established.

From that rapid survey we see a little more clearly the consequent sequence and order. By the first advent the rule of GOD was revealed; the realm of the rule was claimed in His name; and the resources were provided that were necessary for the establishment of the material Kingdom upon spiritual foundations.

The process of to-day is that of individual realization of the Kingdom; world-wide proclamation of the Kingdom by those in whom the Kingdom is realized; and corporate realization of all the breadth and beauty of the Kingdom within the Christian Church.

In this last particular we have most conspicuously failed.

There is no clear manifestation of the Kingdom of GOD in the corporate being of the Church of GOD to-day.

The man outside has no clear vision of the Kingdom of GOD when he looks at the Christian Church. That one undivided whole, the holy nation, where is it? Blessed be GOD, the spiritual unity has never been lost, for He has kept that within His own power; but the outward manifestation has been entirely lost. The most disastrous phase of the Church's failure is her failure in her corporate capacity to reveal to men what the Kingdom of GOD will mean, when it is established in the world.

The last word is that by the second advent there will be accomplished the ultimate victory of good over evil, the subjugation of the whole realm of the earth to the reign of GOD, in and through JESUS CHRIST, and so the fulfillment of the great ideal.

It is ours to ask ourselves the simplest of all questions. Have I entered that Kingdom? If I have not entered that Kingdom, how shall I enter it? I can only enter it as He gives me that life from above that enables me to see it, and seeing it to obey it, and obeying it to become its citizen, and becoming its citizen to fulfill my responsibility while I wait for the flaming glory of His advent, and the ultimate triumph of GOD in the world.

~ end of chapter 13 ~

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