

THE KINGDOM WITHIN

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SCRIPTURE: Matthew 15:10, 11, 15-20.

And Jesus called the multitude and said unto them, Hear, and understand: Not that which goeth into the mouth defileth a man; but that which cometh out of the mouth, this defileth a man ... Then answered Peter and said unto him, Declare unto us this parable. And Jesus said, Are ye also yet without understanding? Do ye not yet understand, that whatsoever entereth in at the mouth goeth into the belly, and is cast out into the draught? But those things which proceed out of the mouth come forth from the heart; and they defile the man. For out of the heart proceed evil thoughts, murders, adulteries, fornications, thefts, false witness, blasphemies: These are the things which defile a man: but to eat with unwashen hands defileth not a man.

I will put my law in their inward parts, and write it in their hearts; and will be their God, and they shall be my people. (Jer. 31:33)

What is the Kingdom of God, and where is it? In this current series of sermons we are discovering that the kingdom has many facets or many modes; that it exists in many places and in many ways.

We have tried to show in previous sermons that any kingdom must have a king, territory, subjects, laws, officers, and organization; and that the kingdom of God is no exception to this rule. But some people have attempted to make the kingdom of God exclusively an affair of the heart. They have taught that the kingdom has no outward form, no organization, no officers, no territory, no tangible laws, no tangible substance at all; but that it exists only within the human heart. For proof of this theory they go to Luke 17, verses 20 and 21, which read: "The kingdom of God cometh not with observation, Neither shall they say Lo here! or lo there! for behold, the kingdom of God is within you."

In this statement, Jesus was speaking not to his own disciples, but to the Pharisees, who came inquiring not where the kingdom was, but when the kingdom should appear, or when political dominion would be restored to Israel. The Pharisees were the "watchful waiters" of Israel, who thought that someday the Messiah would miraculously appear, overthrow Rome by force of arms, and re-establish Israel as the great and glorious kingdom it once had been. They were looking for outward signs, and Jesus is telling them in this statement that there will be none of the outward signs such as they seek. In this statement Jesus is renouncing worldly methods and worldly powers as a means of establishing the kingdom; but obviously he is not saying to the Pharisees, who received his most scathing denunciations that the kingdom was "within them," or "in their hearts." A marginal note to this verse says, "Or among you." Other translations suggest such alternative readings as "The reign of God is in your midst," "God's Royal Majesty has come unto you," "The kingdom is available unto you," or "the kingdom has already come unto you."

The kingdom was not to be exclusively a spiritual thing, existing in human hearts, without any outward manifestations or visible signs. But on the other hand, the visible, tangible signs of the kingdom were to be the result of an inward change -- not the cause. In worldly kingdoms, rule is maintained through force, might, power. In the kingdom of God, the subjects must voluntarily lay down their arms and repent of their rebellion against God, their King by right of creation. They must renounce their old allegiances, and covenant to give allegiance to him. This is an affair of the heart, and of the individual human will. No amount of external force or compulsion, no magical formula or ordinance or ceremony can make a man come into the kingdom if he doesn't want to. We shall have the kingdom of God on earth, not when God conquers the

world and compels men to come in, but when men surrender, and do on earth the will of God as it is done in heaven; when because of a spiritual re-birth they resolve of their own free will to give allegiance to the King and obey his laws, and behave as if the earth were his territory.

Man is so constituted as to be at home in God's kingdom. The laws of that kingdom are written indelibly and inescapably in his heart, in his mind, in every bone and sinew and muscle and cell of his body. Man is made for righteousness, not for wickedness; for peace, not for war; for love, not for hate; for faith, not for fear or worry; for mercy, not for cruelty; for truth, not for falsehood; for honesty, not for deception and lies; for life, not for death. When man tries to live contrary to those kingdom laws which are so much a part of him, he finds only unhappiness, frustration, division, and illness of both mind and body. Wickedness is stupid and suicidal, because it is a betrayal of man's own better nature.

The kingdom of God begins within, but it does not stay within. When a man is spiritually born again, he reacts differently to the world and the people around him, and to that extent the world is changed too. When a man is born again his nature is changed. He cuts the root of evil instead of lopping off the branches, and by giving his undivided allegiance to God, he releases for constructive purposes limitless powers which were formerly dissipated in tensions and conflicts within himself. All of Jesus' teachings, and particularly the sermon on the Mount, are a demonstration of this principle, that if you set the man right, if you clean up the well-springs of motivation and conduct within, the outward actions will take care of themselves. It is that which is within a man's heart, not his unwashed hands, or what he eats, that defiles him. Anger, resentment, hatred in the heart are murder, whether one kills or not. Lust in the heart is adultery, even though the overt act be forbidden through fear. Dishonest and deceitful thinking makes a man dishonest, even though he swears to the truth by most sacred oaths. Revenge and retaliation engender more revenge and greater retaliation; but forgiving your enemies and doing good to them that hate you will engender love and peace.

Is this kingdom quality of conduct practical? Many of us think of it as an ideal which is unattainable by humanity, and have been afraid to try it in actual life situations. But today, after centuries of skepticism about these laws of the kingdom, even coldly scientific men are telling us that the laws of the kingdom are practical; that they do have a definite, demonstrable, practical effect on our health, on our life expectancy, and on our mental equilibrium. Psychosomatic medicine is based on the well-established fact that such mental and spiritual states as worry, anger, resentment, hatred, fear, guilt, remorse, jealousy, loneliness, and feeling of inferiority, have definite results in the form of physical disease. Doctors nowadays can even catalogue your physical and emotional type, and predict with some accuracy the type of disease to which you are most susceptible if you are a hater, a worrier, or obsessed by guilt or fear or remorse.

Maybe we have been wrong all these years about what is practical. Maybe a large proportion of our personal and national and international ills would disappear if men would recognize the kingdom within, and cease their rebellion against God. With physical and mental illness increasing, with war affecting more and more millions of the world's population, with more and more tension and mistrust between nations, maybe it is time for all of us to quit trying to build God's kingdom with might and power and atomic bombs, to yield ourselves in true repentance, to experience the new birth, to receive the new life of the kingdom in our hearts. Then, with the kingdom of God within, we will willingly, gladly do the will of God on earth as it is done in heaven, and with such doing, we shall have a tangible kingdom of God on earth.