



AND
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SAYING...

Willard H. Taylor

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by

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**TO MY
FATHER AND MOTHER
WHO FIRST INTRODUCED ME
TO THE WORDS
OF THE MASTER**

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CHAPTER I

Jesus as a Teacher

Never man spake like this man (John 7:46).

The life and death of Jesus of Nazareth have special significance for Christians. The life of Christ with its unparalleled compassion and love for mankind is the supreme example of the God-directed life. His ignominious death, preceded by Gethsemane's agonizing prayer of commitment, is the deed of deliverance from sin for all who accept it. His triumphant resurrection and exaltation to the right hand of the Heavenly Father, where He intercedes for us, is the Christian's hope of a victorious life, death, and resurrection. Indeed, the winsomeness and force of Christ's personality, as well as His final surrender to suffering, shame, and death, are the saving appeals of the gospel story.

But there are the words of Jesus, too. He proclaimed a gospel. He brought good news from heaven for lost mankind. By listening carefully to His words we can make an estimate of His person and His work at Calvary. By exploring His teachings we can discern what is really truth and find the path to authentic life. It is proper, therefore, to say that His words are

saving words. Or, to put it in different terms, He taught to save and He saved by teaching. Jesus himself declared: ". . . the words that I speak unto you, they are spirit, and they are life" (John 6:63). Power resides in the words of Jesus. Anyone who saturates his mind with these sayings will soon discover his thoughts being possessed by them. Their haunting power will issue in obedience and salvation eventually. Herein lies the supreme challenge in the teachings of our Lord.

Historically, the inherent power of the words of the Man of Galilee is to be seen in their remarkable preservation in contrast to the deterioration of the great cultures which prevailed at the time they were uttered. Harvie Branscomb magnificently states this fact as follows:

In one of the distant corners of that ancient empire [Roman] Jesus did his work. The little Galilean towns in which he spoke were unknown in the greater centers of civilization. His hearers were for the most part simple peasants and fishermen. In all his life he probably never met a person above the rank of the obscure Roman procurator who condemned him to death. He himself wrote nothing which survived even into the early Church, and no official observers or court reporters were present to watch and report the scenes of his activity. Yet out of the change and wreckage of the centuries have come his words, more enduring than the empire which condemned him and more treasured than all the art and literature of the Greek genius. . . . The most abiding thing out of all the ancient past is the four Gospels.¹

Such has been the universal judgment of the men who have spent some time in studying the teachings of Jesus. It accords with the opinion of the officers of the chief priests and Pharisees, who were sent to arrest Jesus, but returned without Him. In attempting to explain their failure to seize the Master, they said:

¹*The Message of Jesus*, rev., Ernest W. Saunders (New York: Abingdon Press, 1960), pp. 9-10.

"Never man spake like this man" (John 7:46). History has substantiated their estimate.

CHARACTERISTICS OF JESUS' TEACHING

While we must recognize that Jesus functioned as a Preacher much like the prophets of the Old Testament, He also performed the service of a great Teacher. Jesus was normally addressed as "teacher." There are 31 instances in the Gospels in which His role is described thus.² The picture we receive from the Gospels depicts Jesus as an itinerant Teacher. He engaged in instruction wherever He found a willing audience—in synagogues (Nazareth, Capernaum), on a highway, in a field, on a hillside, in a private home, or from a boat anchored offshore.

What characteristics can we distinguish in the teaching of Jesus? What sort of Teacher was He? At least four features are easily discernible.

1. *Informal.* This feature is observable both in the setting of much of His teaching and in the material presented. Jesus had no place of instruction, such as those maintained by Gamaliel and Shammai, the two great rabbis. Wherever there were people who looked to Him for a word of instruction, whenever His heart was moved with compassion and He was strongly urged to speak, He plunged immediately into a pertinent discourse. On the occasion of the feeding of the 5,000, Jesus was prompted to speak at length to the crowd which had followed Him around the Sea of Galilee. Mark records: "And Jesus, when he came out, saw much people, and was moved with compassion toward them, because they were as sheep not having a shepherd: and he began to teach them many things" (6:34). On another occasion a paralytic was lowered through the

²In two instances, Jesus refers to himself as a Teacher (Mark 14:14; Matt. 23:8, RSV). "Master" means "teacher."

roof into the presence of Jesus. With a certain naturalness, the Master shifted His attention to the need of that physically handicapped man. Out of the healing which ensued came a word about the Son of Man's relationship to God and His ability to forgive sins (Mark 2:1-12).

The informal character of the Master's teaching ministry is indicated also by the numerous accounts in which He is pictured as simply answering questions raised by His opponents. Some of His profoundest words came out of these encounters. Think of the questions of the rich ruler on eternal life (Luke 18:18-30; cf. Matt. 19:16-26), of the scribe on the greatest commandment (Mark 12:28-34), and of the Herodians on imperial taxation (Matt. 22:15-22). The Gospels give no indication that Jesus ever prepared a formal address. Much of what He taught seems to have been elicited by casual incidents and to have been unpremeditated and extemporaneous. It has the character and vividness of "table talk" or "wayside talk." It springs out of moments of crisis and out of comparatively quiet times with His disciples. Even the Sermon on the Mount (Matthew 5-7) is not developed in strictly logical pattern, though all of it speaks directly to the issue of the nature of Christian righteousness. This informality and spontaneity accounts for the undying appeal of the teaching of the Master.

2. *Practical.* Jesus was interested in life, not in theory. It is not proper to speak of Him as a systematic theologian. His approach to the instruction of His disciples was not to say, "Today we shall discuss the problem of God in an attempt to prove that He exists and perhaps describe His nature." Jesus did not conduct himself as a professor in a classroom, defining terms, laying down premises, and drawing conclusions. No, Jesus' instruction arose out of the circumstances

and conditions at hand. His teaching was primarily life-situational teaching, which sharply attests that He "cared for men and not for ideas. The truth that he cared about was truth that would make for life."³ It is not to be assumed, however, that He was not interested in an appeal to the intellect. Jesus made His appeal by presenting truth as discerned in the day-by-day issues of life. In other words, the Master employed the events of life to expose what is eternally right and wrong. And this approach was wise because His ministry was directed to unlearned, common people mainly, who were not theorists, but highly practical people.

James Stewart has reminded us that it is utterly false to think that, because the teaching of Jesus had this apparently incidental and temporal nature, it is not valid for us today. Indeed, it is precisely because Jesus spoke directly to the real needs of the moment and did not seek to construct a doctrinal or philosophical system that His words have weathered the critical storms of the centuries. James S. Stewart writes, ". . . these flashing words, because they struck home to the urgent needs of the actual men and women whom Jesus met and talked with, remain valid forever. . . . It is because Christ spoke to immediate, definite needs that his teaching now belongs to all the world."⁴

3. *Picturesque.* The most notable feature of Jesus' teaching is His picture language. With the use of figures, illustrations, metaphors from daily life He was able to capture the attention of the people who stopped to listen to Him. The most illiterate person could at least partially comprehend His sayings because they

³Harris Franklin Rall, *The Teachings of Jesus* (New York: Abingdon Press, 1918), p. 26.

⁴*The Life and Teaching of Jesus* (New York: Abingdon Press, n.d.), p. 66.

were couched in vivid, true-to-life pictures. And these matchless images, created with such deft artistry, were like windows through which the light of divine truth could flood the minds and hearts of men. The hearers were enabled to perceive more readily the way of salvation.

Note some of the picturesque sayings. "O Jerusalem, Jerusalem, . . . how often would I have gathered thy children together, as a hen doth gather her brood under her wings, and ye would not!" (Luke 13:34) Speaking of the disciples' witness, He declared, "Ye are the light of the world. A city that is set on an hill cannot be hid" (Matt. 5:14). One of His instructions to His disciples upon commissioning them was: "Behold, I send you forth as sheep in the midst of wolves: be ye therefore wise as serpents, and harmless as doves" (Matt. 10:16). Acknowledging the heart-capturing effect of material things, the Master observed: "It is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle, than for a rich man to enter into the kingdom of God" (Mark 10:25).

Also, by means of parables, brief stories based upon real happenings in life, Jesus vividly and concretely set forth the truth. Usually the parables related to country and village life, with which He was intimately acquainted—the fisherman with his boat and nets (Matt. 13:47-50), the farmer sowing his seed in the field (Matt. 13:3-9), the shepherd tending his sheep (Luke 15:4-7), boys and girls playing "wedding" and "funeral" in the market square (Matt. 11:16-18), and the woman sweeping her house to find one coin (Luke 15:8-10). The wide variety of pictures painted by Jesus touched nearly every aspect of simple Palestinian existence in His time.

4. *Simple*. By simple is not meant naive or lacking in deep significance. Rather, Jesus' teaching

was clear and readily understood. That this was the case is attested by the fact that crowds of ordinary folks would stay all day to listen to Him. On one occasion the people were so engrossed with His teaching they forgot the lunch hour (Mark 6:32-44). These people apparently were comprehending what the Master was preaching, else they would have quickly forsaken Him.

To a large extent the reason for Jesus' clearness was the directness of His speech. The individual sayings are precise in their statement of the truth, yet challengingly simple. For example, "The sabbath was made for man, and not man for the sabbath" (Mark 2:27). Or, "For a good tree bringeth not forth corrupt fruit; neither doth a corrupt tree bring forth good fruit" (Luke 6:43). Or, "For God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have everlasting life" (John 3:16). What could be simpler than that majestic summary of the gospel? The same simplicity evidences itself in the parables too. The parable of the Prodigal Son (Luke 15:11-32) and the parable of the Good Samaritan (Luke 10:30-37) are classic examples.

In this connection it is imperative that Jesus' teachings be taken for what they say. We are not to assume that behind every statement or story there is some hidden truth that can be ascertained only by a clever system of symbolism or allegory. To be sure, some of His words demand painstaking study and must be compared with the whole of His thought, but generally Jesus' thoughts are in accord with our first interpretative understanding of them.

Mark comments on the reaction of the crowds to Jesus: "And the common people heard him gladly" (12:37). Halford Luccock observes that it is difficult to determine what was the specific cause of the

crowd's gladness on this occasion. It might have been Jesus' skill in debate, or His courage in the face of opposition. The people might simply have loved Jesus because of the appeal of His teaching, and the great love which He manifested toward them. But in addition Luccock says, "Men heard Jesus gladly because they could understand him—a great boon. All too often his truth has been translated into an alien jargon, far from the life and speech of men."⁶ The message of Jesus possessed a wonderful simplicity which gripped the minds and hearts of His followers.

THE METHOD AND FORM OF JESUS' TEACHING

As a Teacher, Jesus stood in the great prophetic tradition of Israel. Many of His sayings carried the prophetic awesomeness and authority. In some of His declarations one can almost hear Amos, Isaiah, Jeremiah, and Zechariah. To the unrepentant towns of Galilee, Jesus thundered:

Woe unto thee, Chorazin! woe unto thee, Bethsaida! for if the mighty works, which were done in you, had been done in Tyre and Sidon, they would have repented long ago in sackcloth and ashes. But I say unto you, It shall be more tolerable for Tyre and Sidon at the day of judgment, than for you (Matt. 11:21-22).

In true prophetic manner Jesus predicted the restoration of Israel:

Now learn a parable of the fig tree; When her branch is yet tender, and putteth forth leaves, ye know that summer is near: so ye in like manner, when ye shall see these things come to pass, know that it is nigh, even at the doors (Mark 13:28-29).

"The Gospel According to St. Mark" (Exposition), *The Interpreter's Bible*, ed. George A. Buttrick, et al. (New York: Abingdon-Cokesbury Press, 1951), VII, 850.

Even while He was wearily making His way to Calvary to be crucified, He responded prophetically to the weeping of the women of Jerusalem:

Daughters of Jerusalem, weep not for me, but weep for yourselves and your children. For, behold, the days are coming, in the which they shall say, Blessed are the barren, and the wombs that never bare, and the paps which never gave suck. Then shall they begin to say to the mountains, Fall on us; and to the hills, Cover us (Luke 23:28-30).

Jesus sounds very much like the prophet Daniel when He declares:

But in those days, after that tribulation, the sun shall be darkened, and the moon shall not give her light, and the stars of heaven shall fall, and the powers that are in heaven shall be shaken. And then shall they see the Son of man coming in the clouds with great power and glory. And then shall he send his angels, and shall gather together his elect from the four winds, from the uttermost part of the earth to the uttermost part of heaven (Mark 13:24-27).

Since the Master spoke in the prophetic style, some of the people took Him to be a resurrected prophet. On one occasion He inquired of His disciples, "Whom do men say that I the Son of man am?" They replied, "Some say that thou art John the Baptist: some, Elias [Elijah]; and others, Jeremias [Jeremiah], or one of the prophets" (Matt. 16:13-14). When Jesus rode on an ass into Jerusalem surrounded by a great multitude hailing Him King, the inhabitants of Jerusalem asked, "Who is this?" The indiscriminating crowd hastily replied, "This is Jesus the prophet of Nazareth of Galilee" (Matt. 21:10-11). Most significant, however, is the word recorded by the Apostle John. After Jesus made an impressive speech in the Temple concerning the future outpouring of the Holy Spirit, the people were amazed and some of them concluded,

“Of a truth this is the Prophet” (John 7:40). In all likelihood they were thinking of the great Prophet about whom Moses prophesied (Deut. 18:15).

Jesus also, as a Teacher, stood in the tradition of Moses. Matthew in particular presents the Master as the Second Moses, a new Lawgiver. Indeed, He is the greater than Moses. It is not recorded that Jesus employed this designation of himself, but it is implied in His repeated words: “Ye have heard . . . but I say unto you.” More importantly, Jesus issued commandments in the manner in which the great lawgiver, Moses, issued them. Below are several examples:

But I say unto you, Swear not at all; neither by heaven; for it is God's throne: nor by the earth; for it is his footstool: neither by Jerusalem; for it is the city of the great King. Neither shalt thou swear by thy head, because thou canst not make one hair white or black. But let your communication be, Yea, yea; Nay, nay: for whatsoever is more than these cometh of evil (Matt. 5:34-37).

Love your enemies, bless them that curse you, do good to them that hate you, and pray for them which despitefully use you, and persecute you (Matt. 5:44).

Be ye therefore perfect, even as your Father which is in heaven is perfect (Matt. 5:48).

Thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself (Mark 12:31).

Be ye therefore merciful, as your Father also is merciful. Judge not, and ye shall not be judged: condemn not, and ye shall not be condemned: forgive, and ye shall be forgiven (Luke 6:36-37).

As we shall come to see later, Jesus exercised the prerogatives of Moses in stating the moral demands of God upon the lives of men. Indeed, He spoke more dogmatically and with more personal authority than Moses or any of the prophets. His was “a sovereign legislative authority.” His hearers were compelled to reckon with what He declared as the new law of the Kingdom.

Furthermore, the method and form of Jesus' teaching have much in common with the poetic and wisdom tradition of Israel, such as we find in Job, Psalms, and Proverbs. Jesus was a Poet. His poetry, however, was typically Hebrew with rhyme, rhythm, and parallelism. The double translation from Aramaic, in which His words were spoken, to the Greek and then to the English has not diminished all the poetic characteristics of His teachings. Noteworthy is Jesus' brilliant commendation of John the Baptist:

*What went ye out into the wilderness to see?
A reed shaken with the wind?
But what went ye out for to see?
A man clothed in soft raiment?
Behold, they that wear soft raiment
are in kings' houses.
But what went ye out for to see?
A prophet?
Yea, I say unto you,
and more than a prophet (Matt. 11:7-9).*

In response to a question concerning the coming of the kingdom of God, Jesus burst into poetry:

*The days will come,
when ye shall desire to see
one of the days of the Son of man,
and ye shall not see it.
And they shall say to you,
See here; or, see there:
go not after them,
nor follow them.
For as the lightning,
that lighteneth out of the one part under heaven,
shineth unto the other part under heaven;
so shall also the Son of man be in his day (Luke 17:22-24).*

One of the more famous parables cast in poetic form is that of the wise and foolish builders found at the conclusion of the Sermon on the Mount (Matt. 7:24-27).

Many of the recorded sayings of the Master are much like the brief, wise sayings in the Book of Proverbs. Apparently Jesus used the proverbial form whenever He wanted to appeal to common sense, for a proverb is a pithy saying conveying practical truth. It usually sets forth a truth which the average worldly man would be inclined to accept. Some of the more famous proverbs of Jesus are:

Where your treasure is, there will your heart be also (Matt. 6:21).

With what measure ye mete, it shall be measured to you (Mark 4:24).

Sufficient unto the day is the evil thereof (Matt. 6:34).

They that are whole have no need of the physician (Mark 2:17).

All they that take the sword shall perish with the sword (Matt. 26:52).

For out of the abundance of the heart the mouth speaketh (Matt. 12:34).

No prophet is accepted in his own country (Luke 4:24).

Some of the proverbs of Jesus are traditional ones, such as, "Physician, heal thyself" (Luke 4:23), but many of them are original, as far as scholars are able to determine. In this connection it is to be noted that Jesus recognized the high position which the "wisdom of Solomon" held among His hearers. Nevertheless, concerning himself He announced, "Behold, a greater than Solomon is here" (Matt. 12:42).

Jesus also utilized parables to convey divine truth. Parables were a familiar vehicle of instruction employed by teachers in the Near East. The rabbis occasionally used them to make more explicit the teaching of the Law. Several collections have been assembled

from the Talmud, which contains the expositions of the rabbis. Moreover, there are several parables in the Old Testament, the more famous of which are Nathan's parable of the ewe lamb (II Sam. 12:1-4), Isaiah's parable of the trees (Judg. 9:7-20). While the Master did not invent the parabolic method of teaching, He so brilliantly employed it that it has become almost exclusively identified with Him. So extensive was His use of this form of teaching that Matthew was inspired to record, "All these things spake Jesus unto the multitude in parables; and without a parable spake he not unto them" (13:34).

A parable is a story out of life, told to illustrate some truth. Literally, the word *parable* means "thrown alongside," which is to say, a certain truth is thrown alongside a typical life experience in order to make the truth understandable. One commentator has defined a parable as "an earthly story with a heavenly meaning." To illustrate, the parable of the prodigal son (Luke 15:11-32) is intended to convey the truth that God freely forgives sin like the father who meets his son on the road, eager to forgive him and to restore him to the family circle. In interpreting these stories, we must seek for the central thrust. As Laymon reminds us, "It is the meaning of the story as a whole which is central rather than the details in the narrative."⁶ We are not to treat the parable as allegory, which is so constructed as to make every detail in the story correspond to some part of the truth about life to be conveyed. (Bunyan's *Pilgrim's Progress* is a classic example of allegory.) On the contrary, in the parable the details of the story for the most part must be subordinated to the central point. While the Master did employ allegory at times (the good shepherd,

⁶*The Life and Teachings of Jesus* (rev.; New York: Abingdon Press, 1962), p. 128.

John 10:1-18; the vine and the branches, John 15:1-11; the sower, Matt. 13:3-23), it is quite clear that parables rather than allegories are more characteristic of His teaching.

Why did Jesus use parables? Mark 4:10-12 seems to suggest that a secret knowledge was conveyed by them to His disciples, and unbelievers were thereby denied this truth. But a careful study of these verses will show that concealment of the truth was not the intention. The emphasis falls rather upon the result which all too often attended His teaching. The parables were more than illustrations or attention-getters. They were designed to challenge the mind and spirit of the listeners and thus to precipitate a decision. The challenge involved the acceptance or rejection of the way of discipleship.⁷

The wide range of form in the teaching of the Master speaks of His amazing versatility and attractiveness. He used picturesque hyperbole with deftness. Think of the beam of timber in the eye of a censorious person (Matt. 7:4), or the possibility of moving a mountain with "faith as a grain of mustard seed" (Matt. 17:20). Jesus was effective with paradoxes, that is, statements which seem to be self-contradictory. "Blessed are the meek: for they shall inherit the earth" (Matt. 5:5). "He that is least among you all, the same shall be great" (Luke 9:48). Jesus said to the woman at the Well of Sychar, "Whosoever drinketh of this water shall thirst again: but whosoever drinketh of the water that I shall give him shall never thirst . . ." (John 4:13-14). Thus Jesus profoundly impressed His hearers—both sympathetic and unsympathetic ones—with His vivid stories, highly figurative assertions, and debate-concluding pronouncements. And Luke indicates that

⁷Branscomb, *op. cit.*, p. 29.

an attractiveness was evident in Jesus' manner of address: "And all bare him witness, and wondered at *the gracious words* [winsome words] which proceeded out of his mouth" (4:22). Most assuredly, He was the Master Teacher!

THE AUTHORITY OF JESUS

As the common people and the religious leaders listened to Jesus, the impression He left with them was that He was no dreamer or strange mystic, but One who was in touch with reality. They sensed something impressively authoritative in His preachments. This fact is clearly indicated, in the first place, by the application of the term "rabbi" to Jesus. It was a title of respect reserved for Jewish teachers in the first century.⁸ The word is translated into English as "Master." A high-ranking religious leader like Nicodemus addressed Jesus, "Rabbi, we know that thou art a teacher come from God" (John 3:2). Matthew has recorded a note in which Jesus accused the Pharisees of loving to be called "Rabbi" in the marketplaces and also warned the disciples against using the title for anyone but himself (Matt. 23:7-12).

However, Jesus was not a professional rabbi. Jewish education of the first century was divided into two periods. The first period involved basically the study of the Jewish written and oral law and concluded at age 15. The second period meant advanced training as a rabbi in a professional rabbinic school at Jerusalem. If a Jewish boy desired a nonreligious education, he was compelled to go abroad, to Alexandria, Tarsus, or Athens. The Master did not have this "higher" training. When Jesus preached in His hometown synagogue,

⁸The Gospels picture Jesus as wearing the long, tasseled teacher's robe which the people tried to touch (Mark 6:56; see also Matt. 9:20; 14:36; 23:5; Luke 8:44).

Nazareth, the people were astonished at His learning. They queried, "From whence hath this man these things? and what wisdom is this which is given unto him, that even such mighty works are wrought by his hands? Is not this the carpenter . . . ? (Mark 6: 2-3) Not only did Jesus impress the people with His words and works, but with the very fact that He possessed this wisdom. John 7:15 states explicitly that Jesus did not have formal training: "The Jews marveled at it, saying, How is it that this man has learning, when he has never studied?" (RSV)

The Gospel writer, Luke, in his recording of the Master's first visit to Jerusalem as a child, informs us that Jesus impressed the "doctors" with His comprehension and inquiring mind (2:41-47). Moreover Luke says Christ "increased in wisdom" (2:52). We have every reason to believe that the Master availed himself of all the opportunities opened to a Jewish youth of His day—attendance at the worship services, study of the Holy Scriptures in the day school, and conversation with the sages of the community in which He was reared.

Early in His ministry Jesus established himself as an Authority in spiritual matters. Indeed, the people made comparisons between the teaching of Jesus and that of the scribes. They went away from the Sermon on the Mount astonished, "for he taught them as one having authority, and not as the scribes" (Matt. 7:29; see also Mark 1:21-22). The scribes were a guild of scholars, copyists, and expounders of the Law, who were considered the final authority in matters pertaining to Jewish life. In their interpretations they appealed to tradition or precedent to support their positions. But not so with Jesus. He spoke "with the assurance of firsthand knowledge." He did not need to survey the opinions of other teachers. He spoke out of himself and with individual conviction. Even in

dealing with the Mosaic law, He could declare, "Ye have heard . . . but I say unto you." E. Stanley Jones comments, "In the words of the scribes they [the people] heard the voice of the past; in the words of Jesus they heard the Voice that assumed control over the past, the present, and the future."⁹

Furthermore, the teaching of Jesus was more authoritative because of the self-evident character of the truth He presented. He was not compelled to supply proof for the ideas that love is the supreme way of life, or that one should love his neighbor, whoever he is. The obvious nature of this latter truth is brilliantly portrayed by the Master in the parable of the Good Samaritan. The story itself is sufficient explanation (Luke 10:25-37). Whenever Jesus preached, He said, in effect, "I know that this is true; and if you look at it candidly, you will see for yourselves that it is true."¹⁰ The authority of Jesus' teaching was not that which came from a superficial dogmatism, but from living realities. Through His words, Jesus put men into touch with the whole body of living truth. This He could do only because He was himself the Source of truth. "I am the way, the truth, and the life" (John 14:6). In Jesus, message and Messenger were inseparably bound together and herein lay the basis of authority.

THE ORIGINALITY OF JESUS' TEACHING

Both Jewish and Christian scholars have studied the Gospels, the Old Testament, the writings from the period between the New and Old Testaments, and the

⁹*The Christ of the Mount* (New York: Abingdon-Cokesbury Press, 1931), pp. 318-19.

¹⁰H. D. A. Major, T. W. Manson, C. J. Wright, *The Mission and Message of Jesus* (New York: E. P. Dutton and Co., 1938), pp. 470-71.

Talmud, and have asserted that there are very few teachings of Jesus which cannot be paralleled from these writings. One Jewish scholar has flatly declared, "Without any exception he [Jesus] is wholly explainable by the scriptural and Pharisaic Judaism of his time."¹¹ If this be true, the question must be asked, Is there anything original to the ideas of Jesus? There are several facets in the answer to this important query.

First, Jesus' teaching is part and parcel of the thought that incorporates the Old Testament and much of Judaism. As has already been intimated in the section dealing with Jesus' method of teaching, the Master stood within the Old Testament tradition and spoke out of it. He had much in common with the lawgiver, Moses, the historians, and the prophets of the Old Testament. The Book to which He turned continually for support of many of the things He enunciated was the Old Testament. In essence the truth which Jesus presented was a reiteration of that which had been given by the called servants of God during the pre-Christian period. The demand of God for holiness, righteousness, loyalty, and love toward Him and toward all men, as forcefully proclaimed by Christ, was the message of the Old Testament too.

Second, Jesus' opponents were convinced that He was propagating some new ideas. The opposition of the Pharisees is made abundantly clear in the Gospels. However, Jesus and the Pharisees agreed on numerous points. Both worshiped the true and living God of the prophetic revelation. Both sought to know the will of God as revealed in "the law and the prophets." Both were concerned with high ethical living. Both looked upon the Old Testament as an inspired Authority. The real disagreements came at the point of im-

¹¹Joseph Klausner, *Jesus of Nazareth* (New York: Macmillan Co., 1925), p. 363.

portance of the traditional interpretations of the Mosaic law. The Pharisees insisted that these interpretations, which had been passed along by word of mouth, were just as binding upon men as that which was written in the Hebrew Bible. In Mark 7 we have a record of Jesus condemning the commitment of the Pharisees to the traditions rather than to the commandment of God. By this means they were "making the word of God of none effect . . ." (7:13). They spent their energies explaining trivia and neglected "the weightier matters of the law."

Jesus was, in reality, calling for a life based upon the spirit of the Law. He opposed any notion of salvation by works, which was precisely what the Pharisaic movement promoted. To Him, it was pure and simple legalism.

Also, Jesus claimed for himself a special privilege in dealing with the Law. He frequently exercised the right to go beneath the letter of the Law to re-expose the divine will for man's life lying at the base of the Law (Matt. 5:21-48). Jesus was concerned with the spirit governing behavior, whereas His religious contemporaries were concerned to maintain or promote a system of behavior. Jesus was far more interested in *what men were* than in *what they did*. He knew that a really good man would act in goodness (Luke 6:45). The way of salvation, for Him, was not by works but by grace and faith. Here was a newness, an originality which is perennial because only God's Spirit can make it real to men.

Third, while we can discern some flashes of originality in Jesus' interpretations of the Law, His teaching on the kingdom of God, and His concern for the individual, the real center or originality in Jesus' teaching is to be found in the embodiment of it in His own life. He lived what He taught. He taught men the way of true righteousness which demands radical obedience

unto God, but He demonstrated that obedience in perfection in His own life. Here was a fresh revelation to needy mankind. Furthermore, Jesus taught that loving, humble service to lost humanity is the only path of personal joy and peace. He demonstrated the truth of that teaching by living with sinners and calling them to repentance, and finally by dying at Calvary in behalf of all men.

Someone has said that the original contribution of Jesus is himself. He personified the way of salvation; He was both its Evangel and its Example. This fact simply means that our response to the way of life He taught is related to our response to Him. Bruce Metzger observes that Jesus "so identified himself with his teaching that obedience to it became a matter of personal loyalty to him."¹² Thus, to obey His teaching is to submit to Him personally. He is indeed "the way, the truth, and the life."

QUESTIONS FOR DISCUSSION

1. If Jesus' teaching was divine truth, why was it rejected by His contemporaries? What does this say about the importance of knowledge in the salvation of men?

2. Why was the use of parables so effective among the common people?

3. Understanding that Jesus matured as other young men of His time, when in His life do you think He became aware of His special knowledge of divine things? See Luke 2:52.

4. How would you reply to the following question from a Jewish friend? "You claim that Jesus' teaching is original. My rabbi tells me that everything Jesus said can be found

¹²*The New Testament, Its Background, Growth, and Content* (New York: Abingdon Press, 1965), p. 166.

either in the Old Testament or in the writings of the rabbis. In what way is Jesus' teaching original or unique?"

5. How much authority does the church have in the matter of determining the correct interpretation of the teachings of our Lord?

CHAPTER II

The Kingdom of God

*Jesus came . . . preaching the gospel
of the kingdom of God (Mark 1:14).*

When Jesus began His ministry in Galilee, He went about the countryside preaching a distinctive message. He declared: "The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God is at hand" (Matt. 4:17; Mark 1:15). The Master had many other things to say, but to a degree they are related to this central thought of the Kingdom. Those segments of the Lord's teaching which we remember most clearly have to do with the kingdom of God. For example, the Beatitudes, which have been called "the preamble to the charter of the Kingdom," characterize the people who possess the Kingdom (Matt. 5:3-12). In the Sermon on the Mount, after a graphic statement of the nature of those who are truly righteous, Jesus commanded: "But seek ye first the kingdom of God, and his righteousness; and all these things shall be added unto you" (Matt. 6:33). Obviously, the Master was pinpointing the ultimate goal of life. Also, the parables are frequently introduced by the phrase, "The

kingdom of God is like . . ." The four Gospel writers record more than 60 instances in which the phrase "kingdom of God" is employed. While the Gospel of John has only two references in which the phrase appears (John 3:3, 5), it is the opinion of scholars that the familiar Johannine phrase "eternal life" is the equivalent of the term "kingdom of God." The above facts support the conclusion that the theme of Jesus' teaching was the kingdom of God.

THE NATURE OF THE KINGDOM

The word "kingdom" as used in the New Testament, and particularly in Jesus' teaching, has a dual meaning. On one hand, it denotes a "realm," "territory," "domain," or "people over whom a king rules." For example, Mark 3:24: "And if a kingdom be divided against itself, that kingdom cannot stand." Or Matt. 24:7: "For nation shall rise against nation, and kingdom against kingdom . . ." On the other hand, kingdom denotes "sovereignty," "royal power," or "dominion." For example, Luke 1:33: "And he shall reign over the house of Jacob for ever; and of his kingdom there shall be no end." Or Luke 19:12: "He said therefore, A certain nobleman went into a far country to receive for himself a kingdom [RSV translates 'kingdom' as 'kingly power'], and to return." Thus, whenever we encounter the word "kingdom" in the teaching of Jesus we must determine whether the reference implies realm or rulership.¹

"The kingdom of God" as taught by Jesus has this twofold sense. The phrase designates not only the new order which will be established through Christ,

¹See author's discussion of "The Kingdom of God," *Exploring the Christian Faith*, ed. W. T. Purkiser (Kansas City, Mo.: Beacon Hill Press, 1960), pp. 519-37.

but also "the kingly rule of God" in the hearts of men made possible through the life, death, and resurrection of Christ. Indeed, this latter sense is the correct point of departure in the interpretation of Jesus' teaching on this matter. To be sure, the full-orbed meaning of the phrase includes the fact that where there are royal power and sovereignty there is necessarily a realm or domain. The kingdom of God refers to the kingship of the King of Kings as well as to His dominion.² The kingdom of God exists wherever there are hearts who render obeisance to God as King.

The Kingdom Is Future. Numerous passages from the Gospels indicate that Jesus taught that the Kingdom would come in the future. It refers to a future supernatural state which will come suddenly. Its appearance will bring to an end this present age of evil. In some Gospel passages Jesus seems to suggest that the Kingdom's coming is in the very near future. It is imminent. "The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God is at hand" (Mark 1:15). "Verily I say unto you, That there be some of them that stand here, which shall not taste of death, till they have seen the kingdom of God come with power" (Mark 9:1). We might be tempted to conclude from these words that Jesus meant that the Kingdom would come in the immediate future, in His own lifetime. However in other passages we see that Jesus refers to a future event. There is no conflict, for the kingdom of God is both a present reality in the hearts of men and a distant, future event to be anticipated.

At the Last Supper the Master spoke more specifically about the future. "Verily I say unto you, I will

"Kingdom of heaven" in Matthew is a synonym for "kingdom of God." Since the first Evangelist was writing to the Jew, he was careful to use some of the substitutes for the word "God," one of which was "heaven." The Jews held a deep reverence for the name of God, and were reluctant to vocalize it.

drink no more of the fruit of the vine, until that day that I drink it new in the kingdom of God" (Mark 14:25; Luke 22:18). Behind this passage might well be the thought of the great Messianic banquet, about which we read in Matt. 8:11: "And I say unto you, That many shall come from the east and west, and shall sit down with Abraham, and Isaac, and Jacob, in the kingdom of heaven" (see also Luke 13:28-29). Furthermore, in a number of parables which speak of impending crisis and judgment there is the implication that the kingdom of God, in its full and final sense, will come in the future. Among these parables are the wise and foolish virgins (Matt. 25:1-13), the talents (Matt. 25:14-30; Luke 19:11-27), the sheep and the goats (Matt. 25:31-46), the faithful and unfaithful servants (Matt. 24:45-51; Luke 12:42-46), and the thief at night (Matt. 24:43-44).

Another group of parables relates to the futuristic character of the Kingdom, namely, the seed growing secretly (Mark 4:26-29), the tares (Matt. 13:24-30), the mustard seed (Matt. 13:31-32; Mark 4:30-32; Luke 13:18-19), and the leaven (Matt. 13:3-9; Mark 4:3-9; Luke 8:5-8). It has been common for interpreters to consider these stories as teaching the progressive establishment of the Kingdom. But close examination will reveal that their emphasis is upon the nature of the Kingdom rather than its progressive establishment. In each case the story culminates in an unexpected climax, such as the tiny mustard seed creating a tree, or a minute portion of leaven permeating and virtually re-creating a substance of far greater size than itself. Behind this stress upon the result is the premise that the consummation of the Kingdom is well in the future. In the case of the parable of the tares, Jesus expressly declared, "Then shall the righteous shine forth as the

It is noteworthy that six of the Beatitudes suggest rewards which will be enjoyed in the future King-

dom (Matt. 5:4-9). In the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus specifies who will and will not qualify for entrance into the future Kingdom (Matt. 7:2-23). Finally, one petition in the Lord's Prayer has a futuristic thrust: "Thy kingdom come" (Matt. 6:10; Luke 11:2).

The Kingdom Is Present. Not only does the Kingdom have a "there and then" aspect; it also has a "here and now" character. In a special way it is now being realized. In Mark 4:3-13 the kingdom of God is likened to a seed sown in the hearts of men in this life. In Mark 12:34, Jesus told an inquiring scribe that he was "not far from the kingdom of God." Obviously Jesus was not referring to admission into the Kingdom after the man's death, nor was He suggesting that the scribe would be a member of the Church upon its establishment following the Day of Pentecost. And apparently He did not have in mind His own second coming. Rather, Jesus was making a judgment concerning the spiritual condition of the scribe. This learned religionist was not far from a commitment to God as the King of his life. In Matt. 13:44-46, the Kingdom is described as a treasure hidden in the earth, which men can discover and possess now. Also the Kingdom is "a pearl of great price" which men of good judgment will sell all they own to buy now.

These references imply that the kingdom of God is a present reality, in that the sovereignty of God can be acknowledged and submitted to by men in this life. The kingdom of God refers in these instances to "the kingly rule of God in the hearts of men." But there is a second aspect of this "here and now" dimension of the Kingdom. The presence and activity of Jesus himself are equivalent to the presence of the kingdom of God. Two passages in the Gospels speak to this point.

In Matt. 12:22-30 is recorded an incident in which

Jesus healed a blind and dumb demoniac. As a result, the Lord was drawn into a controversy with the Pharisees, who insisted that Jesus was able to do such deeds only because of His identification with Beelzebub, the prince of demons. Jesus cleverly replied that if He were related to the demonic kingdom He would be working against it to have cast out a demon. Then the Master made this comment: "But if I cast out devils by the Spirit of God, then the kingdom of God is come unto you" (Matt. 12:28). The kingdom of God was at work in Jesus. The powers of the future Kingdom were being released in His ministry and the forces of evil were under attack.

The second passage is found in Luke 17:20-21. In this instance the Pharisees asked Jesus when the Kingdom would come. He replied: "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." Scholars are divided as to whether the last phrase should be translated "within you" or "among you." Nevertheless, Jesus evidently intended to make it clear that the Kingdom's coming is not heralded by observable signs in the sky, as in the then current Jewish expectation. He wanted them to see His relationship to the Kingdom. The true signs of the Kingdom's arrival were being manifest in His lowly mission and in the response in the hearts of men to His ministry. In the fourth Gospel we have the same emphasis. Jesus told 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; see 3:3 also).

Jesus himself, in His role as the Bearer of the announcement of the dawning Kingdom, was the sign of the Kingdom's present revelation. As W. G. Kummel has said: "The Kingdom of God has already become effective in advance in Jesus and in the present events

appearing in connection with his person.³ The powers of the future Kingdom have actually entered history in the person of Jesus Christ, but the Kingdom as a realm in which God's will is perfectly done is yet to come. However, God's power working in the hearts of committed subjects is already radically affecting the present order.

In summary, because of Jesus' unique relationship to the Kingdom, His all-inclusive theme was naturally that the kingdom of God, which refers essentially to "God's holy kingship over the whole world of men and things," will be revealed in consummate glory at the end of the age. But it also is being realized now to the extent that any people will "gratefully and obediently acknowledge him and strive to do his will on earth as it is done in heaven."⁴

THE CHARACTER OF THE KING

The Eternal Sovereign. If the core of Jesus' teaching is the kingdom of God or "the kingly rule of God" in the heart, it follows that God in His essential nature is King of all. To say that God is King is to assert that He is the eternal Sovereign, and that man must render complete loyalty and unquestioning obedience to Him. This is precisely what Jesus taught about God.

When Jesus went through the land of Palestine proclaiming that the kingdom of God was at hand, He found no difficulty in gaining hearers. The phrase "the kingdom of God" was not foreign to the first-century Jew. Branscomb writes: "It meant to every Jew the claim of God to absolute authority over life. The kingdom is God's; he is ruler; he is the absolute

³*Promise and Fulfilment*, trans. D. M. Barton (Naperville, Ill.: Alec R. Allenson, Inc., 1956), p. 35.

⁴Branscomb, *op. cit.*, p. 41.

sovereign; his law must be the standard of life.”⁵ This is what he had been taught from the Old Testament. Jesus, therefore, was not introducing a new idea.

This idea of the kingship of God has its roots in the relationship between God and the people of Israel. God was their King, and they were His servants. Early in Israel’s history, following the deliverance from Egypt, there was no statehood or central government. The 12 tribes constituted a confederacy of large families organized around the ark of the covenant, which was the symbol of the presence of God. The central allegiance of these people was to their God. The form of government, such as it was, has been called a theocracy. God was the real Ruler, and the laws of Moses were the Divine Executive’s directives. The absolute dominion of God is expressed in the first commandment, “Thou shalt have no other gods before me” (Exod. 20:3). Israel well knew, and that through bitter experience, that her Lord would not brook any rivals.

In the days of the judges, the people wanted to make Gideon king, but he resisted the move. He said to the people, “I will not rule over you, neither shall my son rule over you: the Lord shall rule over you” (Judg. 8:23). During the period of Samuel, the Israelites insisted upon having a king like the surrounding nations. Reluctantly Samuel complied with their request and subsequently he anointed Saul, their first monarch. God said to Samuel: “. . . they have not rejected thee, but they have rejected me, that I should not reign over them” (I Sam. 8:7). The king of Israel, even though considered the leader of the people, did not possess autocratic power. God was still King, and His authority and sovereignty were sometimes communicated and exercised through the prophets.

⁵*Ibid.*, p. 37.

The psalms of the Old Testament reiterate the kingly character of God. Ps. 93:2 reads: "Thy throne is established of old: thou art from everlasting." Ps. 145:1 begins: "I will extol thee, my God, O king; and I will bless thy name for ever and ever."⁶ The Hebrew songwriter declared the kingship of God over all nations as well as Israel (see 47:2-3, 6-7). The prophets likewise emphasized the supreme rulership of God over all nations and the universe (see Isa. 44:6; Jer. 46:18; Dan. 7:27; Zech. 14:9).

Hans Wendt concludes that "the name of King must have appeared to the Israelites as the fittest designation for God, and as the most general characterization, in view of His position and His mode of working."⁷ This title carried with it the acknowledgment of God's absolute power and greatness, which was to be made known not only to the chosen people but to all people. And as king, God demanded from men unqualified loyalty and obedience. But from God's side there was guaranteed protection, guidance, and the creation of a righteous and acceptable way of life through His law.⁸

In the teachings of Jesus we discover an intensification or heightening of this concept of God as eternal Sovereign. This is indicated in several ways.

1. The heart of Jesus' teaching is the kingdom of God. The Master unmistakably asserted that the Kingdom is God's. In a few passages the Kingdom is spoken of as belonging to Jesus himself (Matt. 13:41; 16:28; Luke 1:33), but basically the Kingdom is God's (Matt. 6:10; 13:43; 26:29; Luke 11:2). He created it

⁶See also Ps. 45:6; 103:19.

⁷*The Teaching of Jesus*, trans. John Wilson (Edinburgh: T. and T. Clark, 1898), I, 189.

⁸Cf. T. W. Manson, *The Teaching of Jesus* (2nd ed.; Cambridge: University Press, 1935), pp. 191-95.

originally; He rules it now; He gives it to men now through His Son; He will one day destroy all opposition to it.

2. The Master's own unswerving loyalty and constant obedience speak of His immediate recognition of the kingship of God. His Garden of Gethsemane prayer, "Nevertheless not my will, but thine, be done," expresses the submission of an obedient subject to the eternal King (Luke 22:42).

3. For Jesus, the sovereignty of God is seen not so much in "the most violent and awe-inspiring convulsions of nature," but rather in the casual manifestations in the commonplace things of the field and life. As Manson says, "The wild flowers in the field and the daily provision for the birds take the place of earthquake and storm."⁹ A sparrow cannot fall without God knowing it (Matt. 10:29). The number of the hairs of one's head are known to God (Matt. 10:30). God clothes even the grass of the field with its passing beauty (Matt. 6:30). The picture Jesus presented of God was that He is "Lord of heaven and earth" and He exercises authority over it. It is His sun which shines upon the earth, and by His will alone it shines and rises upon the just and the unjust (Matt. 5:45).

4. That God is conceived as the King is seen in the implied conflict and the outcome between the kingdom of God and the kingdom of Satan. According to Mark 3:23-27, Jesus asserted that the demonic world was organized against God. "And if a kingdom be divided against itself, that kingdom cannot stand. And if Satan rise up against himself, and be divided, he cannot stand, but hath an end" (Mark 3:24, 26). Man must decide to which kingdom he will submit himself. Manson

⁹*Ibid.*, p. 162.

comments: "The kingdom of Satan makes large promises and threats. There are times when the servants of God seem to be engaged in a losing battle. But for Jesus the final result is already assured; the sovereignty of God is absolute."¹⁰ God as King is also Judge. Men will be compelled to give an account of their loyalties and deeds in this life (Matt. 24:42-51; 25:14-30). The idea of judgment is bound up with that of the Kingdom.

5. Jesus' emphasis upon the power of God in His ministry is evidence of God's position as King. "Wherever, in the life of the individual, or in the world, the forces of evil are checked, there the sovereignty of God is manifested."¹¹ Luke records Jesus' saying: "If I with the finger of God cast out devils, no doubt the kingdom of God is come upon you" (11:20). Jesus went on to say, in effect, that only one Person can enter Satan's dwelling, spoil his goods, and bind him. That One is the greater King (see Luke 11:21-22). The power of God is unmatched. Nothing natural or supernatural is capable of prevailing against it. God is all-powerful. So it was that Jesus could promise: "With God all things are possible" (Matt. 19:26; Mark 10:27).

The Heavenly Father. Every discriminating student of the entire Bible will learn that the Master did not teach a new doctrine of God. Taken as a whole, Jesus' teaching about God is substantially that which is found in the Old Testament. That which is original in Jesus' presentation, however, is His underscoring of the fatherhood of God. This emphasis is only fragmentarily presented in the Old Testament and was almost lost sight of by Jesus' religious contemporaries. The Lord makes this truth the "foundation whereon to base weighty teaching in regard to God's gracious action,

¹⁰*Ibid.*, pp. 166-67.

¹¹*Ibid.*, p. 168.

and the right mode of piety on the part of man."¹² For Jesus, the King is Father. This truth is epitomized in the opening words of the Lord's Prayer: "Our Father which art in heaven." He who is in heaven, who rules over all, is Father.

First of all, looking at the Old Testament references, God is the Father of the people of Israel, whom in love He chose and bound into a community (Deut. 1:31; 8:5; 32:6; Isa. 1:2; Hos. 11:1). Israel is called the first-born son of God. "And thou shalt say unto Pharaoh, Thus saith the Lord, Israel is my son, even my first-born" (Exod. 4:22; see also Jer. 31:9). It is out of this fatherly concern that God speaks through the prophets that He will redeem Israel. "Is Ephraim my dear son? is he a pleasant child? for since I spake against him, I do earnestly remember him still: therefore my bowels are troubled for him; I will surely have mercy upon him, saith the Lord" (Jer. 31:20). The Israelites recognized this paternal relationship and prayed to God as Father. "Doubtless thou art our father, though Abraham be ignorant of us, and Israel acknowledge us not: thou, O Lord, art our father, our redeemer; thy name is from everlasting" (Isa. 63:16).¹³ Malachi preaches that all men are sons of God by creation (2:10), but more basic to his thought is the ethical nature of the fatherhood of God. "A son honoureth his father, and a servant his master: if then I be a father, where is mine honour? and if I be a master, where is my fear?" (1:6) In Ps. 103:13 we read, "Like as a father pitieth his children, so the Lord pitieth them that fear him." In the words

¹²Wendt, *op. cit.*, p. 185. See also William Barclay, *The Mind of Jesus* (New York: Harper and Bros., 1961), pp. 113-17.

¹³It is noteworthy that the term "father" is not found in Psalms, which was central in the worship of the Israelites. The idea of kingship is more prevalent there, though the concept of fatherhood is present (Ps. 103:13).

of Barclay, “. . . God is the father of the good and the righteous in a way in which He cannot be the father of the disobedient and rebellious.”¹⁴

In examining Jesus' teaching on the fatherhood of God, we discover three illuminating facts:

1. *God is the Father of the Lord Jesus.* Here we see “the extraordinary intimacy” of the Godhead. Jesus possessed a deep consciousness that He belonged to the Father and for that reason shared in the loving care of God. He spoke of God as His own Father. “Who-soever therefore shall confess me before men, him will I confess also before my Father which is in heaven” (Matt. 10:32). Upon His knees in the Garden of Gethsemane, Jesus prayed; “Abba, Father, all things are possible unto thee; take away this cup from me: nevertheless not what I will, but what thou wilt” (Mark 14:36). According to some scholars, this address of “Abba, Father” has not the remotest parallel in all Jewish literature. Indeed, the Jews of Jesus' day considered such an approach “too informal and intimate to be used in addressing deity.” “Abba” suggests all the confidence which a loving child places in a faithful father.

John's Gospel gives profound expression to this element of intimacy. Two passages merit note here. The first is John 5:17-47. The mutual relationship between the Father and the Son is such that the Father has enabled the Son to perform many of the saving functions. “Verily, verily, I say unto you, The Son can do nothing of himself, but what he seeth the Father do: for what things soever he doeth, these also doeth the Son likewise” (John 5:19). The second passage is the famous high-priestly prayer in chapter 17. The Son asks the Father that the divine glory rest upon Him

¹⁴*Op. cit.*, p. 115.

as He yields His life in sacrificial atonement (17:5). He prays for the future care and sanctification of His disciples (17:17). This passionate plea of the Son for the spiritual well-being of His close followers is based upon the Father-Son intimacy. "O righteous Father, the world hath not known thee: but I have known thee, and these have known that thou hast sent me. And I have declared unto them thy name, and will declare it: that the love wherewith thou hast loved me may be in them, and I in them" (John 17:25-26).

This closeness of Jesus to the Father comes to its richest expression at the Cross. On that cruel instrument of death, Jesus prayed: "Father, forgive them; for they know not what they do" (Luke 23:34). When the end had come, the Master turned to the Heavenly Father: "Father, into thy hands I commend my spirit" (Luke 23:46). It is quite obvious from the Gospels that the Father was the supreme reality in Jesus' own life. T. W. Manson comments: "By what he is he makes the Father real to men. By being the Son he reveals the Father, so that men see the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ. To this one central fact all other things are subsidiary, so that even the teachings which we have from Jesus concerning the nature of the Father must yield in importance to the revelation of the Father in the Son."¹⁵

2. *The fatherhood of God means loving care for mankind.* The Heavenly Father knows the wants of men and provides for them. "Therefore I say unto you, Take no thought for your life, what ye shall eat, or what ye shall drink; nor yet for your body, what ye shall put on. Is not the life more than meat, and the body than raiment? Behold the fowls of the air: for they sow not, neither do they reap, nor gather into

¹⁵Op. cit., p. 113.

barns; yet your heavenly Father feedeth them. Are ye not much better than they?" (Matt. 6:25-26) His loving care is extended even to those who refuse to obey Him. Jesus said that God makes "his sun to rise on the evil and on the good, and sendeth rain on the just and on the unjust" (Matt. 5:45).

By strong contrasts in precept and parable, the Master taught that God's disposition is that of active, generous love. The Father desires to give out of His bounty to men, and especially to His followers. In the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus declared: "If ye then, being evil, know how to give good gifts unto your children, how much more shall your Father which is in heaven give good things to them that ask him?" (Matt. 7:11) Luke 12:32 records Jesus as encouraging His disciples with these words: "Fear not, little flock; for it is your Father's good pleasure to give you the kingdom." In the parable of the laborers in the vineyard in Matt. 20:1-16, those who had labored only the last hour of the day received as much wages as those who had worked all day. Protest by the latter workers brought a disconcerting reply from the landlord: "Is it not lawful for me to do what I will with mine own? Is thine eye evil, because I am good?" (20:15) The action of God, represented in the landlord, is that of unexpected generosity.

The liberality of God, as portrayed in the relationship of fatherhood, is thoroughly ethical. While Jesus' teaching about God highlights His mercy, love, and concern for men, it does not overlook the holiness, majesty, and uncompromising righteousness of God. In prayer the Master addressed God as "Holy Father" (John 17:11) and as "Righteous Father" (John 17:25). In one all-inclusive command, Jesus summed up the reason why the life pictured in the Sermon on the Mount is expected of men: "Be ye therefore perfect, even as your Father which is in heaven is perfect" (Matt.

5:48). The standard for "the life of the mount" is the ethically dependable and virtuous character of the Father.

The prayer which Jesus taught His disciples begins with reverence to the name of God. ("Hallowed be thy name," Matt. 6:9-13; Luke 11:2-4). The name of a person in Jewish tradition indicated the character of the person. In this case, the disciples are to acknowledge and reverence God as holy. In one of the Beatitudes it is affirmed that the pure in heart shall see God (Matt. 5:7). This statement implies that only the pure in heart can know and enjoy the presence of the holy God. A continuing relationship with the Heavenly Father rests upon righteous and holy living, else there is an incompatibility between sinful man and God, who is pure in His moral nature.

This all means that the concept of fatherhood is not to be taken as shallow sentimentalism. The Heavenly Father is radically good and gracious, but for that very reason a moral demand is placed upon every man to respond to Him and to permit Him to create the same kind of goodness, holiness, and righteousness in the believer. Jesus declared: "Not every one that saith unto me, Lord, Lord, shall enter into the kingdom of heaven; but he that doeth the will of my Father which is in heaven" (Matt. 7:21; see Luke 6:46). When Jesus sent out the 12 disciples under the leadership of the Spirit of the Father (Matt. 10:20), He gave them explicit instructions as to their service; but He also warned them, "And fear not them which 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" (Matt. 10:28). According to John's Gospel, God the Father loves to the extent of giving His Son for man's salvation (John 3:16); but those who refuse to believe on the Son, into whose hands the Father has given all things, will fall under the wrath of God (John 3:35-36).

3. *God the Father has a seeking love for His people.* This truth is dramatically set forth in the unforgettable parables of the lost sheep, the lost coin, and the lost son (Luke 15).

God is like the shepherd, who leaves the ninety and nine, and goes out into the wilderness to find the one lost sheep. The question of Jesus is so pointed: "What man of you, having an hundred sheep, if he lose one of them, doth not leave the ninety and nine in the wilderness, and go after that which is lost, until he find it?" (Luke 15:4)

God is like the woman who lost one-tenth of all her savings, and did not spare energy or time in trying to find it (Luke 15:4).

More specifically God is like that father who ran out to greet his son and whose only reproof was the best robe in the house and a feast of rejoicing (Luke 15:11-24).

It is the gracious heart of the Heavenly Father which provokes Him to seek the lost through His Son and to forgive us all so readily. Matt. 18:14 summarizes Jesus' word on the saving disposition of God: "Even so it is not the will of your Father which is in heaven, that one of these little ones should perish."

In a story from John's Gospel we are told that Jesus healed a lame man at the Pool of Bethesda on the Sabbath (John 5). Because this miracle was performed on the Sabbath and considered "labor," the Jews condemned the Master. The reply of Jesus was indirect, yet revealing: "My Father is working still, and I am working" (5:17, RSV). The significance of this response on the part of Jesus is twofold. First, it speaks of the continuous action of God. Whereas the Jews of Jesus' day tended to play up the transcendence of God, thus diminishing His involvement in the affairs

of men, Jesus asserted that God was always near at hand and busy seeking to meet man's needs.

Second, the Master identified His own righteous works with that of the Father's. He too took initiative in ignoring the stifling laws concerning the Sabbath in order to aid the infirm man at the pool. By His own action Jesus was saying to His contemporaries, "You misunderstand God. He is not a religious ornament. He is a Person of love and compassion. He comes to us when we are in spiritual and physical need. He is a God who takes redemptive and providential initiative. And I am His Son." In the words of Wendt, "The idea of God as the Father, in whose nature love is the supreme characteristic, necessarily led Jesus to emphasize the unresting Divine activity springing out of that love."¹⁶

In conclusion, T. W. Manson reminds us, the Heavenly Father and the Heavenly King are the one and same Person in Jesus' teaching. The Kingship and the fatherhood are identical but represent different aspects of God's nature and activity. The kingdom of God is a paternal government. "God is most truly King because he is most truly Father."¹⁷

QUESTIONS FOR DISCUSSION

1. In what sense can we speak of the Church as the kingdom of God?
2. What in the history of Israel would cause the people to interpret their hopes in terms of the establishment of a national earthly kingdom? See Gen. 12:1-2; 15:18; Josh. 1:12-15. See the biblical references to "the throne of David."
3. In what ways can we speak of God as sovereign?

¹⁶*Op. cit.*, p. 206.

¹⁷*Op. cit.*, pp. 163-64.

Does the sovereignty of God mean that God can act automatically in His dealings with man?

4. What do we have in mind usually when we pray, "Thy kingdom come"?

5. Discuss: Will the kingdom of God ever be established on the earth?

CHAPTER III

The Way into the Kingdom

*Strait is the gate, and narrow
is the way (Matt. 7:14).*

The heart of Jesus' ministry is indisputably the kingdom of God. Admission into the Kingdom constitutes the essence of man's salvation and therefore his joy and hope. But how does one enter the Kingdom and know its saving benefits? The answer to this question calls for a consideration of Christ's relationship to the message of the Kingdom, the issue of sin in man's experience, as well as a study of the conditions for entering the Kingdom as set forth by Christ.

THE MESSAGE AND THE MESSENGER

Behind the teachings of Jesus stands the Teacher himself. To set this whole matter of revelation in proper perspective, we are compelled to say that the words of Jesus as recorded in the New Testament do not disclose the whole of the truth of God. Jesus himself is the fundamental part of it. Everything about Him—character, acts, miracles, teachings—contributes to the

revelation. Jesus therefore was more than teacher, indeed more than prophet. To deliver a verbal message from God was not the essence of His responsibility, but rather to embody in His whole incarnate life the nature and demands of God. He did not simply utter *truths*, but was himself "the truth" (John 14:6). So it is that He could assert to the astonishment and anger of the Jews: "He that hath seen me hath seen the Father" (John 14:9; see also 1:18). The authority and significance of the teachings lie in the fact that He, the Eternal Son, speaks them. Middleton Murry has expressed this fact in the following way: "No one can understand Jesus who does not understand his teaching; but no one can understand his teaching who does not understand his life and death. The teaching without the life, the life without the teaching—these are incomprehensible."¹

The interrelation of the Messenger and His message means that whatever is demanded or promised by His message can be realized by identification with the Messenger. Christ's word is God's word (John 7:28; 8:28, 47; 14:24); Christ's cause is God's cause (John 6:38); Christ's claim upon men's lives is God's claim (John 8:39-47). Men are saved when they come to Christ, and it follows that when they come to Him they come to God.

When Jesus came proclaiming the kingdom of God, He did not say, "I am the King," for if He had done so, He would have gone the way of many other "messiahs" much sooner than He did. But He did make it plain, by what is written in the Gospels, that the kingdom of God was present because He was present. "Behold, a greater than Solomon is here" (Matt. 12:42). "The kingdom of God is within [or better, in the midst of] you" (Luke 17:21). In this passage the Lord declares

¹*Jesus, Man of Genius* (New York: Harper & Bros., 1926), pp. xii ff.

in essence, "Since I am here, the Kingdom is here." The prophecy of Zech. 9:9 was indeed fulfilled when Jesus entered Jerusalem riding upon a donkey: "Behold, thy King cometh unto thee . . ." (cf. Matt. 21:5). In one of His counseling sessions with His disciples, in which He attacked the problem of "which of them should be accounted the greatest," the Master spoke of His kingship: "And I appoint unto you a kingdom, as my Father hath appointed unto me; that ye may eat and drink at my table in my kingdom, and sit on thrones judging the twelve tribes of Israel" (Luke 22: 29-30). The Roman procurator, Pontius Pilate, wrote with more insight than he realized when he had inscribed on the Cross, "THIS IS THE KING OF THE JEWS" (Luke 23: 38).

In Jesus men meet the King of Kings, God himself. William Neil comments: "God is in history, in the human life of Jesus, confronting men with a challenge and an invitation. Jesus reveals God as the Father whose mercy and love open the door of the Kingdom to men as they are, sinful, foolish and perplexed, if they will only . . . see their sin and folly and ask forgiveness. . . ."² In the Gospels we discover references which speak of Jesus' extraordinary claims upon the hearts and lives of men. He demands to be recognized as Lord. Hugh Martin writes, "We may regret that, we may resent it, but the fact cannot be denied. The evidence in all our documents is incontrovertible."³

THE KINGDOM'S ENEMY

Speaking of Jesus' role as Saviour, James Stewart writes: "Wherever he went, he encountered men, potential sons of God, whose fellowship with their Father in

²*The Life and Teaching of Jesus* (Philadelphia: J. B. Lippincott Co., 1965), pp. 157-58.

³*The Claims of Christ* (London: SCM Press, 1955), p. 43.

heaven . . . one power had destroyed. All along the line the progress of humanity was being held up and thwarted and thrown into confusion by the one stubborn enemy. The enemy was sin."⁴ Stewart goes on to say that sin was "the ubiquitous fact with which Jesus, in seeking to establish the Kingdom, had to deal."⁵ When we survey the Gospels we discover a realism in the sayings of Jesus concerning sin. He was no abstract thinker; He offered no highly polished definitions of the nature of sin. His view of sin can be summarized under two categories.

1. *The Inwardness of Sin.* It is this fact which set Jesus' views over against the prevailing ones of His contemporaries. They judged the religious condition of their fellows by their outward actions. As legalists, they conceived sin to be basically a lack of conformity to the written and unwritten law. This limited view of sin was vigorously attacked by our Lord in the Sermon on the Mount (see Matt. 5:21-48). Jesus taught that sin is a condition of the heart of man. Mark records, "And he said, That which cometh out of the man, that defileth the man. For from within, out of the heart of men, proceed evil thoughts, adulteries, fornications, murders, thefts, coveteousness, wickedness, deceit, lasciviousness, an evil eye, blasphemy, pride, foolishness: all these evil things come from within, and defile the man" (7:20-23). The Master sought to expose the fallacious view of redemption which seems to say, If we abstain from certain forbidden deeds, we are God's people. He also taught that "the thought and the desire are quite as important as the action and the deed. . . . We must not only not do the forbidden thing, but that *we must not even want to do it.*"⁶ De Vries

⁴*Op. cit.*, p. 80.

⁵*Ibid.*

⁶Barclay, *op. cit.*, p. 128.

comments, "The true quality of the outward life is determined by and is a manifestation of the spiritual attitude within, whether for good or for ill (Matt. 7:15-27)."⁷ Heart attitude, therefore, must be taken into consideration whenever human behavior is morally evaluated.

Barclay sees "three great facts about sin" arising out of Jesus' teaching.⁸ First, it brings all men under sin. We may say that we have never committed any of the forbidden acts, but if we have ever desired to do them, we are sinners. Second, God alone can judge men, for "God alone sees the secrets of the hearts of men." Third, ". . . God is the only cure for sin. The plain truth of life is that a man may master his actions, but he can never by himself master his thoughts and his desires."⁹

In several of His parables Jesus described man's sinful condition. In terms of his relationship to God, man is "lost," which is to say, that he is estranged from his Maker. This theme lies at the heart of the kindred parables of the lost sheep, the lost coin, and the lost son in Luke 15. Man is a "prodigal son," who sins excessively and thus is "far away from God" and has lost the privileges of the Father's home. The guests who are invited to "The Great Feast" are likewise "lost" from God and in their world of material things. They are preoccupied with personal interests to such a degree that they cannot respond to a genuine invitation from the king to the marriage banquet of his son (Matt. 22:1-10). Judgment is the inevitable end of such behavior.

The extent of man's sinfulness is likewise expressed

⁷"Sin, sinners," *Interpreter's Dictionary of the Bible* (New York: Abingdon Press, 1962), IV, 372.

⁸*Op. cit.*, pp. 128-30.

⁹*Ibid.*, p. 130.

in terms of "hopeless indebtedness." In two parables, the ungrateful debtor in Matt. 18:23-35 and the two debtors in Luke 7:41-43, the debtor is insolvent and, as T. W. Manson comments, ". . . even with the best will in the world, the debtors cannot pay what they owe." Manson goes on to say, "The 'debt' consists in the failure to produce the sort of character and life that God requires, the things that St. Paul describes as 'the fruit of the Spirit.'"¹⁰

2. *The Expressions of Sin.* According to James Stalker, Jesus discerned "three notorious forms of sin," namely, the sin of the publican, the sin of the Pharisee, and the sin of the Sadducee. While this categorizing of sins might be a bit overdrawn, yet in the Master's precepts, parables, and personal encounters these forms are generally observable.¹¹

a. *The Sin of the Publican.* The members of this class committed sin "openly in public, either defying public opinion or being too destitute of self-control to be able to hide their weakness." Actually, they had broken through the moral fences of Palestinian religion, and thus lived as a reproach to the religious community.

The sin represented by the publican is essentially that of "the high-handed breaking of the divine laws." The publicans, Matthew and Zacchaeus, were greedy and covetous, and, having flouted national feelings, they entered into a kind of servitude to the Roman government by agreeing to collect their taxes in Palestine (Matt. 9:9-12; Luke 19:1-10). John's Gospel records the story of the woman taken in adultery, who received the forgiveness of Christ. The classical example of the "open sinner" is the prodigal son, who rebelled against every restraint and went out to live in outbroken sin (Luke

¹⁰*Op. cit.*, p. 310.

¹¹*The Ethic of Jesus* (New York: George H. Doran, 1909), pp. 107-48.

15). Christ's cryptic response to the Pharisees who sarcastically asked the reason for His eating "with publicans and sinners" clearly indicates the conditions of these persons. "They that be whole need not a physician, but they that are sick" (Matt. 9:12). Such blatant disregard of the laws of God meant that these sinners were unquestionably diseased; heart and hand produced only evil. The astonishment of the religionists over Christ's free and frequent association with them is most understandable in the light of these facts. They suspected Him of spiritual chicanery, but He responded, "The Son of man is come to seek and to save that which was lost" (Luke 19:10).

b. *The Sin of the Pharisee.* Holy indignation characterized Jesus' reaction to the sins of the Pharisees. While "extraordinary tolerance" was displayed by the Master toward the publicans and sinners, utter disgust and impatience were His reactions to the conduct of the members of this dominating sect. Their habits of prayer, fasting, and almsgiving were ridiculed in the Sermon on the Mount (Matthew 5—7). Jesus painted their self-righteous behavior in unforgettable strokes in the parable of the Pharisee and publican at prayer in the Temple (Luke 18:10-14). The Pharisee is there pictured as nauseatingly proclaiming, "God, I thank thee, that I am not as other men . . ." (Luke 18:11). The irrepressible feelings of the Lord regarding these leaders and their sin broke forth near the end of His earthly ministry. Matthew 23, which Stalker says is "not surpassed by any other utterance of Jesus,"¹² is comprised of illustrations of "the sin of the Pharisees." Jesus ridiculed their use of broad phylacteries, long prayers, and their struggle for the honorary seats at feasts. He declared that their proselytism or alleged evangelism resulted in making a man "twofold more the child of

¹²*Ibid.*, p. 119.

hell" than the Pharisees themselves. He called them "fools," "blind guides," "hypocrites," "white-washed tombs" (Phillips), "serpents," and "a generation of vipers." The "seven woes" against the Pharisees in Matthew 23 would seem to suggest that "they had carried iniquity to the point of perfection."¹³

Barclay designates three sins as the ones which Jesus most sternly condemned: (1) self-righteousness, which is "a consciousness of virtue" based upon one's own efforts to be good; (2) externalism, which identifies goodness solely with certain external acts rather than basically with the attitude of the heart; (3) hypocrisy, which is simply "living a lie."¹⁴ Doubtlessly, the fact that the name Pharisee has become synonymous with hypocrite is the result of Jesus' scathing rebuke of this group. The malignancy of these sins lies in the developed delusion which leads a person to believe himself to be as good as he pretends. It renders one therefore incapable of repentance unless he "comes to himself" and admits to himself that really he is like the prodigal son inwardly. On one occasion Jesus replied to the Pharisees, who were deriding Him because of His teachings: "Ye are they which justify yourselves before men; but God knoweth your hearts: for that which is highly esteemed among men is abomination in the sight of God" (Luke 16:15).

c. *The Sin of the Sadducee.* The second leading religious party in Palestine during the life of Jesus was the Sadducees. They rejected "the tradition of the elders," and clung only to the written law of Moses. They denied the resurrection of the dead and the existence of angels and spirits. In effect, they denied any doctrine which had to do with a future life. Being the

¹³*Ibid.*, p. 118.

¹⁴*Op. cit.*, pp. 127-28; see the usage of the word "hypocrite" in Matt. 6:2, 5, 16; 7:5; 15:7; 16:3; 22:18; 23:13, 15, 25-27; 24:51.

aristocratic, priestly class, they ruled the Temple and lived sumptuously on its revenues. Naturally they reacted violently to Jesus' act of cleansing the Temple (Mark 11:15-19), because in that act of justice they saw the possibility of losing their source of wealth and luxurious living.

What was "the sin of the Sadducee"? Stalker's answer is "worldliness." "If the spiritual and eternal stirred them but faintly, all the more tenacious was the grasp they took of the concerns of the present life."¹⁵ The Gospels indicate that Jesus' contact with them was pretty much limited to the latter portion of His ministry. However, according to Stalker, some of His parabolic teachings must have had them in mind, as, for example, the parable of the rich man and Lazarus (Luke 16:19-31). Dives, as tradition has named him, "lived to dine and to wear sumptuous clothing, neither bestowing on the poor any generosity commensurate with his means nor remembering that he was an heir of eternity."¹⁶ Or the parable of the rich fool might be an explicit reference to the spirit of the Sadducee (Luke 12:16-21). The absorption of this farmer in this present life is part and parcel of the spirit of worldliness. It might well be that these religious leaders were in the Lord's mind when He told the story of the unjust judge and the poor widow, since the Sadducees took a prominent part in the judicial business (Luke 18:1-8). The same Sadducean spirit is seen in the parable of the great supper, in which those invited offered worldly excuses as to why they could not attend (Luke 14:15-24).

Any careful student of the Lord's words is impressed not only with the frequent references to money but the drastic character of His comments. He pronounced a "woe" upon the rich (Luke 6:24-25). He said,

¹⁵*Op. cit.*, p. 128.

¹⁶*Ibid.*, p. 131.

"It is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle, than for a rich man to enter into the kingdom of God" (Matt. 19:24; Mark 10:25; Luke 18:25). Matthew records that a young man, who possessed both an attractive personality and riches, came to Jesus inquiring about possessing "eternal life." The Lord's prescription was severe: "Go and sell that thou hast, and give to the poor, and thou shalt have treasure in heaven." Hearing these words, the youthful seeker went away sorrowful. To His disciples Jesus then commented: "Verily I say unto you, That a rich man shall hardly enter into the kingdom of heaven" (Matt. 19:16-23). Another all-inclusive exhortation of Jesus, which probably was directed against the Sadducees and those who fell victim to their spirit of worldliness, is quite pointed: "Lay not up for yourselves treasure upon earth, where moth and rust doth corrupt, and where thieves break through and steal; but lay up for yourselves treasure in heaven . . . for where your treasure is, there will your heart be also" (Matt. 6:19-21).

Many other refined points of Jesus' view of sin could be explored, such as its Satanic source (John 8:44), the possibility of committing "the unpardonable sin" (Matt. 12:31-32), and the accumulative and destructive effect of sinning (Matt. 13:13-15; John 5:14). But this is sufficient to show that the blessings of the Kingdom cannot be enjoyed as long as man disobeys God's commandments and lives in sinful alienation from Him.

THE INVITATION OF JESUS

The ministry of the Lord was not just explanatory and descriptive; it was also challenging. No listener could go away saying, "So what am I supposed to do?" He knew full well what was expected of him. Jesus preached with specific purposes in view. He sought decisions. In surveying the Gospel material we find

frequent invitations which the Master extended to men. They constituted mankind's way out of sin and into the joyful and redeeming life of the kingdom of God. And Jesus' essential relationship to that Kingdom meant that His invitations involved coming into a new relationship with Him.

1. *The Invitation to Rest.* Matthew records the most majestic of Christ's calls to men. "Come unto me, all ye that labour 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" (Matt. 11:28-30). When the Master's opponents heard these words, they must have shouted angrily, "Blasphemy!" They would not have found it objectionable for Jesus to invite men to himself; any teacher might do that. But when He commanded, "Take my yoke upon you, and learn of me," they quickly discerned that He was substituting His yoke for that of their religious teachings.

This term "yoke" had been applied to the Law. Ecclesiasticus 51:26, a Jewish writing of the second century B.C., records the imperative: "Bring your necks under her yoke." This is plainly a reference to the Law. One of the rabbis of the first century A.D. commented: "He that takes upon himself the yoke of the Law, from him shall be taken away the yoke of the kingdom (i.e., the oppression of earthly political forces) and the yoke of worldly care." Freedom from the cares and troubles of this life was thus guaranteed those who came under the bondage of the Law. But Jesus claimed to do for men what the Jews claimed the Law could do. His implication that rest could be found only in coming to Him was taken by His hearers as a shocking thrust against the sacredness of the Law. It meant that the Law produced only weariness because of the

multiplication of unwritten regulations, whereas His way offered release and repose to those who were weighted down by the prescriptions of their religious leaders.

Jesus' invitation meant that He was the way into the life of the Kingdom. T. W. Manson concludes: "‘Come unto me’ then means ‘Become my disciples,’ and that means in practice ‘Enter the Kingdom of God.’ ‘Take my yoke upon you’ means in effect ‘Take the yoke of the Kingdom upon you,’ and that means ‘Enter the Kingdom of God.’"¹⁷ Other teachers might have exhorted in true prophetic tradition, "Come, let us return to the Lord our God." But Jesus pleaded, "Come unto me." In Him, the One with the meek and lowly heart, resided the threshold of the Kingdom. Discipleship to Jesus meant therefore Kingdom living.

2. *The Invitation to Life Satisfaction.* While the Gospel of John was the last of the four to be written, and while it tends to be more interpretative of the life of our Lord, it nevertheless stands alongside the other three in offering us keen insight into His teachings. The words "I am" were employed by Jesus quite frequently, according to John's writing. To prick the minds of the Jews on one occasion, He declared, "Before Abraham was, I am" (John 8:58).¹⁸ Usually, however, the Master cast His use of "I am" in the form of a metaphor, which described some aspect of His purpose in coming into the world.

6: 35, 48—"I am the bread of life."

6: 51—"I am the living bread."

8: 12—"I am the light of the world."

¹⁷Major, Manson, Wright, *op. cit.*, p. 479.

¹⁸Cf. Exod. 3:14, "I AM THAT I AM." See also Jesus' emphatic "I" in Matt. 5:22, 28, 32, 34, 39, 44, where His discussion of the Mosaic law is recorded.

10: 7—"I am the door of the sheep."

10: 11—"I am the good shepherd."

11: 25—"I am the resurrection, and the life."

14: 6—"I am the way, the truth, and the life."

15: 1—"I am the true vine."

Space prohibits discussing these pronouncements here. Stephen Neil's comments will suffice. "We might have expected Him to say, 'I give the bread of life,' 'I show you the way,' 'I tell you the truth;' but He does not. He cannot separate His message from Himself. . . . He is Himself the center of His own message and of the challenge that He brings."¹⁹ This means that believing the words of Jesus and believing Jesus are one and the same thing. Likewise, obeying the commands of the Lord and obeying the Lord are experientially the same. If He were not the Son of God, these Johannine assertions represent an intolerable arrogance and fraud. But since He is the Son, they constitute heaven's ultimate challenge to man's heart.

Implicit in these "I am's" is the invitation to salvation. Jesus speaks of himself as Bread, Light, the Door of the sheep, the Good Shepherd, the Resurrection, the Way, the Truth, the Life, and the Vine. Figuratively they tell us that He satisfies the deepest yearnings and needs of the human spirit. Christ nourishes our inner spirit and gives us moral and spiritual strength. He sheds light upon our pathways, showing us the way we should conduct our lives. He is the means whereby we enter into the fellowship of spiritual life. As the Good Shepherd, He guards the flock of the redeemed. Moreover, the life which He makes available to believers promises resurrection from the death of sin and reunion with Him in the eternal Kingdom. He is all

¹⁹*Who Is Jesus Christ?* (London: United Society for Christian Literature, 1956), p. 40.

that man needs—"the way to be followed in action, the truth to be believed, the life to be lived."²⁰

3. *The Offer of Forgiveness.* Jesus came to deal with the issue of sin in the lives of men. That is why John the Baptist introduced Him as "the Lamb of God, which taketh away the sin of the world" (John 1:29). T. R. Glover once commented that the Master gave sin "an importance it had never had before; He brought out its meaning; he got it into the light of God's face. But he also brought men to look on God's face."²¹ Jesus knew what sin does to the moral and spiritual sensitivities of men. He also knew how sin presages degradation and misery and eventually exclusion from the presence of God. The word He brings, therefore, is a word of hope. God will forgive the wayward one.

The three companion parables in Luke 15—the lost sheep, the lost coin, the lost son—accent the active, seeking love of God. The story of the prodigal son especially highlights the good word that God is a forgiving Father. The once rebellious son returns to find "the waiting Father," who takes him back into the family without penalty.

Astonishing was the claim on the part of Jesus that He possessed authority to forgive sins. To the man sick of the palsy, He declared: "Son, thy sins be forgiven thee" (Mark 2:5). To the woman who anointed His feet with oil from the alabaster box, He announced: "Thy sins are forgiven" (Luke 7:48). That the Master would permit himself to be touched by such a disreputable person puzzled the Pharisees. They had questioned His associations with sinners and publicans.

²⁰William Temple, *Readings in St. John's Gospel* (London: Macmillan and Co., 1959), p. 78.

²¹*Jesus in the Experience of Men* (New York: Grosset and Dunlap, 1921), p. 91.

Jesus did not condone sin in relating himself to sinners; He rather sought out those who needed forgiveness to offer it to them.

The Big Fisherman (Luke 5:1-11), Zacchaeus, the tax gatherer (Luke 19:1-10), the criminal on the cross (Luke 23:39-43)—all must have enjoyed the release and relief which forgiveness affords even though the specific declaration was not made by the Master to them. Finally from Calvary the Lord petitioned the Father: "Forgive them; for they know not what they do" (Luke 23:34). This intercession is not without condition. The prayer does not suggest that all are to be forgiven without admission of need on their part. But as William Klassen comments, "He prays that they may eventually come to experience God's forgiveness. On the cross the greatest barrier of all is removed."²² The holiness and justice of God would not permit indiscriminate, universal forgiveness. God is indeed ever ready and anxious to forgive, but He can do so only on condition of repentance and in the sinner's acceptance of the work of Christ at the Cross (see Matt. 26:28). Hugh Martin observes: "The man who identifies himself with Jesus' saving act upon the cross, in repudiation of sin, has made it possible for God to forgive him. For he is being changed in the core of his being."²³

Forgiveness, therefore, in the teaching of our Lord is the bestowal of God's good pleasure upon the sinner. Of the two men who prayed in the Temple—the learned theologian and the "grafting petty tax official"—only one went back to his home justified (Luke 18:14). The publican cried out for mercy because he knew assuredly that he was a sinner. He was therefore "justified," "acquitted," forgiven, made a new man! Jere-

²²*The Forgiving Community* (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1966), p. 133.

²³*Op. cit.*, p. 91.

mias rightly concludes: "Justification is forgiveness, nothing but forgiveness for Christ's sake."²⁴

4. *The Invitation to Unqualified Loyalty.* "Devote your whole life to Me and My service," expresses the call of Christ. Whatever would hinder such devotion must be laid aside. The fishermen of Galilee—Peter, Andrew, James, and John—understood the significance of Christ's imperative, "Follow me," that day on the shores of the lake (Matt. 4:18-22), for they had previously felt the impact of His personality in Judea (John 1:29-51). They straightway left their nets, boats, father, and all business connections to follow the Master. The cost had been counted, and their hearts told them that He was the Messiah. In this case it was not so much Christ's message that compelled them as it was the authority of His own person.

Jesus also called for the breaking of natural bonds between father, mother, son, or daughter if there was any possibility of conflict with fidelity to Him and His mission (Matt. 10:37-39; Luke 14:25-27). Loyalty to Him must take precedence over loyalty to one's kindred. The phrase "for my sake" appears in several exhortations of the Master, and its significance lies in the call to utter surrender to Him. The final reward of the disciple who leaves home, kindred, and possessions "for my sake" is "eternal life" (Matt. 19:29; Mark 10:29-30). Hostility from one's Jewish contemporaries and Roman authorities is to be expected. But there is also the possibility of being betrayed by one's family whenever one lives "for my sake" (Mark 13:13a). Christ's call for unqualified loyalty rests squarely upon this ultimate reason: "He that findeth his life shall lose it; and he that loseth his life for my sake shall find it" (Matt. 10:39; Luke 17:33). Even when death is a

²⁴*The Central Message of the New Testament* (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1965), p. 57.

threat, it is "better loyalty and death than desertion and life."²⁵

5. *The Call to Confess Christ.* Man's destiny will be determined by the testimony of Christ according to Matt. 10:32-33. "Whosoever therefore shall confess me before men, him will I confess also before my Father which is in heaven. But whosoever shall deny me before men, him will I also deny before my Father which is in heaven." In both the Matthean and Lukan settings where this idea is found, the matter of the outcome of each man's life is the principal concern. In Luke 9:26 and Mark 8:38, Jesus is recorded as saying that He will be ashamed in the day of His coming of all those who are ashamed of Him now. Men have to answer to the claims of Christ finally. Response to Christ is "the test which settles a man's eternal destiny."

P. T. Forsyth a long time ago expressed in a rare paragraph the relationship of the Master to the Kingdom, part of which is as follows:

The Gospel of the Kingdom was Christ in essence; Christ was the Gospel of the Kingdom in power. The Kingdom was Christ in a mystery; Christ was the publication, the establishment of the Kingdom. . . . He was the truth of His own greatest Gospel. It is wherever He is. To have Him is to ensure it.²⁶

Clearly to become a disciple of Christ is to enjoy the fatherly rule of God. What Jesus says of himself in effect He says of the Kingdom. Entrance into the Kingdom is accorded those who come to Him.

THE CONDITION OF ADMISSION

With the appearance of Christ upon the human stage the rule of God was felt on the earth. The powers

²⁵Martin, *op. cit.*, p. 46.

²⁶*The Person and Place of Jesus Christ* (Boston: Pilgrim Press, 1909), p. 122.

of the future Kingdom impinged upon the existing human situation. The healings, the casting out of demons, the conversion of sinners bore strong evidence that something supernatural was taking place. Indeed, the kingdom of Satan was being routed before the mighty thrust of the kingdom of God (see Matt. 11:1-6; Luke 4:16-21; 11:20).

With the inauguration of the Kingdom there came a challenge to the hearts of men to enter it. Jesus appealed to the men of His day: "I am the Way into the Kingdom of God; come, follow Me into it." In figurative language He referred to himself as "the door of the sheepfold," and only through Him can men enter the fold. Obviously, such a call indicate that man is then outside the Kingdom. And from what Jesus said, it is easy to remain outside. "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" (Matt. 7:13-14). Decisive action is demanded of the one who would make the venture into the Kingdom. The entrance is narrow and the way immediately beyond it is hard (the original language suggests this truth). However, the reward is eternal life. John's Gospel seldom employs the phrase "kingdom of God." However, in its place it uses "eternal life," which is the equivalent. To press through the narrow gate into the Kingdom is to step into eternal life here and now.

Passing through the gate is depicted in a variety of ways, but two figures of speech employed by Jesus are prominent.

1. *The Childlike Spirit.* Jesus preached to His disciples: "Except ye be converted, and become as little children, ye shall not enter into the kingdom of heaven" (Mat. 18:3; Mark 10:15). To confident, rational-

izing adults these were hard words. But Jesus made it clear that admission into the Kingdom comes only to the man who strips himself of all his pride, his sinful self-sufficiency, and his self-righteousness. All who enter must come with the submissiveness and sense of helplessness of a child as they turn to God, acknowledging Him as Creator and Lord and Father of their lives. Saunders writes: "To become as small children is to accept God's reign as his good gift to us, and to know that the Giver is no tyrant but one whom men can address as *Abba*, or *Father*."²⁷

2. *The New Birth*. To Nicodemus, Jesus said, "Ye must be born again" (John 3:7). Such language puzzled the learned rabbi and might even bewilder the religiously illiterate today. Actually the Master, in His use of this terminology, moved one step further in expressing the divine challenge to the sinner. In the Synoptic Gospels, He is recorded as speaking about pre-childhood—being born again. In effect, the Lord said to Nicodemus: "You need a whole new life if you are to enter and to comprehend the kingdom of God." This kind of experience, Jesus went on to say, is supernatural. It is a birth "from above." Thus, by moral and spiritual quickening, that is, by being brought into spiritual life by the power of God, the sinner experiences the life of the Kingdom. God's kingdom consists of the "sons of God," who are "born, not of blood, nor of the will of the flesh, nor of the will of man, but of God" (John 1:12-13). It is in the willingness to allow God to give one a new beginning and to accept a new kind of life that one is born again and constituted a member of the kingdom of God.

Christ laid down the condition that every man must repent in faith if he would know the life of the Kingdom.

²⁷*Jesus in the Gospels* (Englewood Cliffs, N.J.: Prentice-Hall, 1967), p. 101.

Mark 1:15 gives the essence of His message: "The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God is at hand: repent ye, and believe the gospel." The Greek word for "repent" (*metanoein*) signifies "to change one's mind." But as applied by Jesus, it suggests a change relating to the whole person. In repentance, thought, emotions, and will are radically reversed. As Saunders comments, ". . . it carries the meaning of a turning which affects the whole complex of personal life."²⁸ It is never just a formal regret for past offenses nor a sorrow for failure to fulfill one's best intentions. It is much more revolutionary. God is allowed to move into the center of the life as the Controller.

The will of God becomes the will of the Kingdom man. Commitment lacks authenticity if a fellow keeps looking over his shoulder to the old life and the old modes of behavior. Jesus said: "No man, having put his hand to the plow and looking back, is fit for the kingdom of God" (Luke 9:62). The Master indicated that repentance is a life-and-death matter spiritually. In full recognition of the universal sinfulness of man, Jesus on one occasion said to some doubters: "I tell you, Nay: but, except ye repent, ye shall all likewise perish" (Luke 13:1-5).

The call to the Kingdom is primary since everything of value and of hope for mankind hinges upon it. The condition is totalitarian, too, demanding utter abandonment to God. In fact, a person must be ready to make any sacrifice however costly not only to enter the Kingdom but to continue to live in it. It would be better to be maimed than to miss the Kingdom life (Mark 9:43-50). One must be willing, if need be, to sell all his possessions to enjoy it, even as he would sell all to own a precious pearl (Matt. 13:45-46).

But repentance takes place only as there is a simul-

²⁸*Ibid.*, p. 99.

taneous turning to Christ in faith. To believe the gospel is to accept the offer of forgiveness and the new life with God through Jesus Christ. The encounter with Jesus inspires both faith and repentance. Neil reminds us that "God is in history, in the human life of Jesus, confronting men with a challenge and invitation. Jesus reveals God as the Father whose mercy and love open the door of the Kingdom to men as they are, sinful, foolish and perplexed, if they will only, like the Prodigal Son, see their sin and folly and ask forgiveness."²⁹ Faith is born at the juncture where one's sinfulness is acknowledged and one's hope of deliverance from it is assured through the work of Christ. Jesus preached: "Fear not, little flock; for it is your Father's good pleasure to give you the kingdom" (Luke 12: 32)—and that with all its release from guilt and sin!

QUESTIONS FOR DISCUSSION

1. What did Jesus mean when He said we must become like little children in order to enter the Kingdom?
2. Sin takes on many forms. What are some of the most prominent manifestations of sin in our society? To what situations in our society would Jesus speak if He were here?
3. We often speak of repentance and faith as the conditions or requirements of salvation. Should we speak of them as separate acts of the seeker or should they be considered as happening together?
4. Are there any modern versions of "the sin of the Pharisees"?
5. Why are so-called religious people least susceptible to, and supportive of, evangelistic movements?
6. Interpret Jesus' comment in Matt. 7:14, "Few there be that find it."

²⁹*Op. cit.*, pp. 157-58.

CHAPTER IV

Life in the Kingdom

I am come that they might have life, and that . . . more abundantly (John 10:10).

To be brought under the sovereign rule of God through obedient response to His Emissary to men, Jesus Christ, is to enjoy a new kind of life. The men of the Kingdom are new men with new patterns of living. The range of Jesus' description of Kingdom living is extensive in word and concept. It is described as a personal relationship to God (Matt. 6:33; 19:14) in which God's righteousness is experienced and child-like trust prevails. On the other hand, Jesus speaks of discipleship to himself as constituting the essence of this life (Matt. 16:24-25; John 5:40; 10:28; 14:6). Once again we see the unity of the Godhead in providing salvation for us. The Father and the Son working intimately and mysteriously together bring about the regeneration of sinful men and set them upon a new path of living.

HUMILITY

Since admission into the kingdom of God rests upon repentance and faith, and since the life which

it brings is a gift of God, the attitude of the believer can only be that of humble gratitude. The beatitude which introduces the Sermon on the Mount gives expression to this fact. "Blessed are the poor in spirit: for theirs is the kingdom of heaven" (Matt. 5:3). A. E. Barnett once commented that the word "blessed" might well be translated "God-approved." "Poor in spirit" means "aware of their own failures, shortcomings, and insufficiency." Brash self-confidence has no place in the heart of the Christian disciple. Jesus ruled out pride of place when He rebuked James and John, who sought special position in the future Kingdom. He reminded them that: (1) greatness is measured finally by the degree of service rendered to others; and (2) speaking of himself, "The Son of man came not to be ministered unto, but to minister, and to give his life a ransom for many" (Mark 10:35-45). Jesus reinforced this call to humility by taking a towel and washing the feet of His disciples. In so doing He pulled the disciples up short. He told them frankly that if the servant's Lord deigns to humble himself to engage in such a lowly act, the servant should have no questions as to his own responsibility (John 13:4-17).

The Master would countenance no attitude which permitted a man to stand before God and declare, "What a good boy am I!" He vigorously condemned the proud when He told the story of the Pharisee and publican at prayer (Luke 18:10-14). The teaching of the parable is clear: "For every one that exalteth himself shall be abased; and he that humbleth himself shall be exalted" (Luke 18:14b). A proper and God-inspired estimate of oneself will (1) keep one from censoriousness (Matt. 7:1-5); (2) bring praise to God because His grace is the reason for one's redemption. In the story of the slave who, while serving faithfully, received no special commendation from his master, Jesus told His hearers to always admit, "We are unworthy servants;

we have only done what was our duty'” (Luke 17:10, RSV). Humility and thankful love for God's gift of Kingdom life stand over against any pride or claim to righteousness.

Luke, who seems to sense the depth of Jesus' teaching on humility, preserves for us the parable of chief seats, in which the Lord warned: “When thou art bidden of any man to a wedding, sit not down in the highest room [the place of honor] . . . sit down in the lowest room; that when he that bade thee cometh, he may say unto thee, Friend, go up higher” (Luke 14:7-11). Quite obviously this was a condemnation of the “pushy” and proud Pharisees (see Matt. 23:6). The life of the Kingdom spurns spiritual pride. As Harvie Branscomb observes, the humble spirit is basic in the ministry of the Lord because of “the innate fineness of Jesus' own spirit. He himself shrank from all ostentation and pretense.”¹ Understood in this context, humility is not self-abasement but rather a challenge to greatness of spirit.

SINCERITY AND HONESTY

The ethic of the Kingdom roots in the nature of God. His own being dictates how the members of the Kingdom should behave. The genuinely good and loving spirit of the Creator God is seen in His coming to us in Christ, the Son. As a consequence of submission to Christ, the true follower maintains a genuine disposition of sincerity and honesty before God and men. Jesus' intriguing little parable on the eye speaks eloquently to this point. “The light of the body is the eye: therefore when thine eye is single, thy whole body also is full of light; but when thine eye is single, thy whole body also is full of light; but when thine

¹*The Teachings of Jesus* (New York: Abingdon-Cokesbury Press, 1931), p. 197.

eye is evil, thy body also is full of darkness" (Luke 11:34). William Manson comments: "When an eye is normal and healthy it registers true impressions. If contrariwise the eye is diseased the body remains unlighted. So Jesus warns his hearers against trifling with conscience."² The condition of the inner spirit therefore determines the behavior patterns. A sincere heart gives rise to honest actions and attitudes.

Jesus had in mind the issue of sincerity when He attacked the handling of the Law by His contemporaries who tended to gauge sin only by the external act. In the Sermon on the Mount, He asserts that the new order of the Kingdom will not permit the overt acts of murder, adultery, perjury, and revenge nor the hidden passions which inspire them—anger, lust, swearing, and retaliation. Love and respect must be the drive of the heart toward all men and toward God. Almsgiving must not be done to be seen of men but to meet the needs of others. Likewise prayer must never be public declaration of piety but personal communion with God (Matt. 5:2—6:7). The Kingdom life evokes an expression of the real self in word and deed. There can be no pretense or sham. Jesus viewed the hypocritical behavior of the religionists of His day as not just self-deception but downright dishonesty. Branscomb observes: "One feels what Jesus aimed at was that luminous, open disposition that instantly attracts."³ Heart and hand are to be bound together in one genuine act. The Kingdom life demands this kind of harmony in the behavior of her members. Herein lies the righteousness which exceeds the righteousness of the scribes and Pharisees (Matt. 5:20).

Singleness of purpose is also part of this same

²"The Gospel of Luke" in *The Moffatt New Testament Commentary* (London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1930), p. 144.

³*The Teachings of Jesus*, p. 203.

facet of Kingdom living. Jesus said: "Where your treasure is, there will your heart be also" (Luke 12:33-34). No man can serve two masters and the Christian has made his decision to allow Christ to be his Master (Matt. 6:24). This is the only way that he can maintain his integrity. The parable of the talents in Matt. 25:14-20 teaches more than prudence and industry. It emphasizes sincere and devoted action. The one-talent man described is not truthful or honest. He complains about the conditions of his service and then proceeds to blacken the name of his master. A man of the Kingdom trusts his Master and therefore renders wholehearted, loving service to Him.

THE FORGIVING SPIRIT

The rationale for the forgiving spirit for Kingdom members in the man-to-man relationships of life is succinctly stated by William Manson: "Forgiveness, if it is the first of God's gifts to us through Christ, is the first duty which the Christian owes to his fellow-men."⁴ We can understand therefore why the Lord talked explicitly, though not lengthily, on this subject. First, there is the well-known statement in the Lord's Prayer, which He personally taught His disciples. "And forgive us our sins; for we also forgive every one that is indebted to us" (Matt. 6:12; Luke 11:4).⁵ Christ gave a fairly precise outline of the procedure for handling serious differences in the life of the community of believers, as recorded in Matt. 18:15-21. He was then asked by Peter how often he should forgive a brother who sinned against him. Seven times? Jesus' reply is shocking to the average worldling: "No, not seven

⁴Op. cit., p. 135.

⁵For a discussion of the implications of this verse, see *Beacon Bible Commentary* (Kansas City: Beacon Hill Press, 1964), VI, 63, 508.

times, but 70 times seven" (Matt. 18:21-22). In effect, Jesus is saying that the Christian should be possessed with what Saunders calls an "unwearying readiness to forgive." Of course, such forgiveness is evoked by the spirit of repentance in the sinner. Luke records this fact. "Take heed to yourselves: If thy brother trespass against thee, rebuke him: and if he repent, forgive him. And if he trespass against thee seven times in a day, and seven times in a day turn again to thee, saying, I repent; thou shalt forgive him" (Luke 17:3-4).

The most biting words of Jesus on this matter of the forgiving spirit are found in the parable of the unmerciful servant (Matt. 18:23-35) which follows upon His response to Peter's question. The parable stands as an example of that which constitutes the most reprehensible behavior in the person-to-person struggles of life. Pictured here is a government official who apparently had misappropriated some revenues. The result was a colossal debt of some \$10 million. Though forgiven by the king, he goes out to hold a fellow worker accountable for a paltry obligation of \$20.00. The ire of the king is naturally aroused upon hearing of the official's unforgiving spirit and he condemns him to torture until the \$10-million debt is paid. Christ makes it clear in His comments that the wrong attitude in these disturbing life matters will have serious experiential and eternal consequences. "So likewise shall my heavenly Father do also unto you, if ye from your hearts forgive not every one his brother their trespasses" (Matt. 18:35). The fifth beatitude reads: "Blessed are the merciful: for they shall obtain mercy" (Matt. 5:7). Saunders cogently comments: "Only those who deal mercifully are prepared to be dealt with mercifully."⁸

In conclusion, a forgiving spirit is a sure indicator

⁸*Op. cit.*, p. 147.

of unselfish love. To forgive is to acknowledge the right of another to live with heart peace and in a reconciled relationship with his fellowman. Furthermore, to be a son of God means to share His nature, which unquestionably is one of love and forgiveness. Men of the kingdom of God share the disposition of the King, which the Son personally possessed and which He petitioned the Father to release to others through the Cross: "Father, forgive them; for they know not what they do" (Luke 23:34).

THE SUPREMACY OF LOVE

In ancient Israel the king was God's vicegerent on the earth. He represented the divine will to his subjects. He therefore was the supreme example for the Israelites, and they looked to him for reliable direction in matters of moral and spiritual concern. For the king to falter spiritually, as happened in the case of David, was tragic. But now Christ reigns and we must look to Him for guidance in holy living. Both in what He preached and how He lived and died Christ made love supreme as the essence of the God-approved life. The Heavenly Father, according to Jesus, desires "an utterly full-hearted, unreserved love" for himself and for our fellowman.

The Royal Commandments. One of the common theological debates in the rabbinical schools of Jesus' time involved the question, "Which commandment is the first of all?" The famous rabbi Hillel gave this answer: "What is hateful to thee do not to anyone else; this is the whole law and the rest is commentary; go and study." When Jesus was confronted with this question by a scribe, who was well-versed in the Torah, He responded by citing the *Shema*, the traditional confession of faith of Israel found in Deut. 6:4-9, and a commandment on loving one's neighbor from Lev. 19:

18. "Hear, O Israel; the Lord our God is one Lord: and thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy mind, and with all thy strength: this is the first commandment, And the second is like, namely this, Thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself. There is none other commandment greater than these" (Mark 12:28-34).

Three aspects of this analysis of the command of the King are noteworthy. First, Jesus makes it clear that these commandments to love take priority over all others. T. W. Manson comments: "For Jesus these two stand in a class by themselves. There is no other commandment that can come before them to claim man's obedience. They enjoy priority, not logical or relative, but absolute."⁷ Other New Testament writers understood love's role in the Christian life in the same terms (See Rom. 13:10; I Cor. 13; Gal. 5:13-14; Jas. 2:8).

Second, these commandments are not prescriptive; that is to say, they do not specify particular acts. Rather, they designate the disposition which the people of God must have towards God and their neighbors. However, love cannot be commanded; it must be created. It is not a natural instinct of man to devote himself unconditionally to God and to live with inwardly compulsive concern for his fellowman. There must be a change of heart, an inward transformation, if love is to be the all-dominating set of the spirit. This love, which is the ground of all worship of God and service to others, is a gift of God. It is not created by persistent attempts to love God or to be charitable toward our neighbors. The history of mankind attests the hopelessness of this self-help religion. Loving behavior Godward and manward is a product of an experience with the loving God in which one commits himself with his whole being to God.

⁷*Op. cit.*, p. 304.

Third, Christ's love is the norm of divine love. John 13:34 reads: "A new commandment I give unto you, That ye love one another; as I have loved you, that ye also love one another." Jesus repeated this emphasis according to John 15:12: "This is my commandment, That ye love one another, as I have loved you." The brief yet weighty clause, "as I have loved you," is "the characteristic and hallmark of the gospel ethic."⁸ It differentiates the Christian view of behavior from that accepted by the Jewish community of the first century. The love which Christ had for His disciples and for all men was characterized by total unselfishness. It was not just a benevolent attitude toward others less fortunate than himself; it was a self-giving which viewed the object of love of infinite value and merited the expenditure of every personal good in order to effect restoration and peace.

For the Christian, the full definition of this true love is found in the ministry of Christ. Its crowning manifestation takes place on the cross of Calvary. From his German prison cell Dietrich Bonhoeffer echoed this truth: "No one knows what love is except in the self-revelation of God. . . . It is only the concrete action and suffering of . . . Jesus Christ which will make it possible to understand what love is."⁹ Stewart comments: "Every day of his life the disciples saw their master squandering his strength for the sick and the sinful; and when Calvary came, they knew that it was for sheer love of them that he had died."¹⁰ If we are to love our neighbors as ourselves, we will need that our love be made like Christ's love in quality and spirit. Paul believed that we could possess such love,

⁸T. W. Manson, *Ethics and the Gospel* (London: SCM Press, 1960), p. 62.

⁹*Ethics* (New York: The Macmillan Co., 1955), p. 173.

¹⁰*Op. cit.*, p. 120.

because he speaks of the love of God being "shed abroad in our hearts by the Holy Ghost which is given unto us" (Rom. 5:5).

Who Is My Neighbor? Kingdom life, as we have already indicated, possesses a desire to live in right relationship with the whole of the human race. Both friend and foe are to be embraced in love by the follower of Christ. Stewart has stated that ". . . while men did not need many qualifications to be his disciples, no man could be a disciple who was not prepared to love. The heart of the world was crying for love."¹¹ The young scribe, after receiving an answer to his question on eternal life, asked another important question: "Who is my neighbour?" (Luke 10:29) The rabbinic debate on Lev. 19:18 had limited the definition of neighbor to the fellow Israelite and the proselyte to the Jewish faith.

In response to this second query of the scribe, Jesus told the story of the Good Samaritan. At the conclusion of the parable He threw the challenge back to His questioner: "Which man, the priest, the Levite, or the Samaritan was a neighbor?" (Luke 10:36) Cleverly, Jesus redirected the initial question so that the focus was upon the benevolent one rather than the recipient of benevolence. Undoubtedly the scribe wanted an official, "legal" answer to his inquiry, but Jesus gave him a "love" answer. As the story turns out, a Samaritan, a half-breed enemy in the eyes of the Jews, was prompted to be a neighbor by caring lovingly for a desperately needy Jew. The issue of neighborliness lies with the person who has the opportunity to serve. If there is no love in his heart, he will not attempt to meet the needs of "others," whoever they might be. Love from the divine perspective defines neighbor as any person in need. As Saunders asserts: "Love is seen

¹¹*Ibid.*, p. 117.

to be entirely uncalculating, unrestricted, and unlimited in its manifestation. . . . Love overrides all reservations and frontiers, if it be in the shape of God's love."¹²

Love of Enemies. First-century Palestine was no peaceful land. The crosscurrents of antipathy were many and intricate, Jews despising Samaritans and Romans. Conversely Roman authorities were irritated by the Jews, Pharisees were suspicious of Sadducees and Herodians, and the entire religious community was intensely wary of any professed messiahs. It would appear that every man had his enemy. Jesus' gospel would not permit Him to ignore these antagonisms which splintered that ancient society.

He instructed His followers: "Love your enemies" (Matt. 5:43-47; Luke 6:27-38).¹³ The passage in Luke makes it clear how one is to love his enemies. (1) "Do good to them which hate you"; engage in deliberate acts of helpfulness. (2) "Bless them that curse you"; speak kindly of those who do not extend such a courtesy to you. (3) "Pray for them which despitefully use you"; talk to God about them who see you only as a means to acquire something for themselves (6:27-28). Jesus furthermore gave some examples of loving action toward enemies, such as turning the other cheek when struck, giving one's shirt when his coat is taken, satisfying readily the needs of a beggar, and not demanding return when one's goods are stolen (Luke 6:29-30).

The motivations for loving one's enemies are several. First, *the golden rule*: "And as ye would that

¹²Op. cit., p. 143.

¹³Matthew's record includes the word: "Ye have heard that it hath been said, Thou shalt love thy neighbour, and hate thine enemy" (5:43). There is no word in the Old Testament which exhorts hating one's enemies. It is true, however, that sectarians of the day pledged themselves to hate all the children of darkness because they opposed the work of God.

men should do to you, do ye also to them likewise" (6:31). This is a secondary motivation, to be sure, for one should treat all men lovingly because he acknowledges them as God's creatures and as persons who need love. However, this is a valid rule of thumb. One's dealing with others should correspond to his desires for himself. Second, *the superior behavior of disciples of the Lord*: "For if ye love them which love you, what thank have ye? for sinners also love those that love them" (6:32). The bedrock reason for this precept is expressed in 6:35: "And ye shall be the children of the Highest: for he is kind unto the unthankful and to the evil." God acted lovingly toward them when they were His enemies; now they ought to act correspondingly toward their enemies. Third, *the divine reward*: "Your reward shall be great" (6:35). God reciprocates by continuing the relationship of sonship for them, granting them mercy and forgiveness (6:36-37), and enriching their lives with His overflowing blessings (6:38).

Love of others which God plants in the heart and which Jesus exemplified and provided is evangelism in action. To turn the cheek, to give a shirt, to go the second mile, and to lend cheerfully are to open doors for speaking for Christ. The recipient is compelled in due time to ask, "Why does he behave as he does? Why is he so generous to me? Who enables him to take so much mistreatment?" To have the privilege of answering those questions is a Christian's delight. It affords him an opportunity to talk about the forgiving, transforming love of Christ.

PRAYER

Kingdom living is also characterized by prayerfulness. Saunders has noted that prayer both testifies to and confirms that "extraordinarily vivid and dynamic

immediacy of God for the believer."¹⁴ God is "at hand" in Christ and because of that fact there is every assurance now that God will commune with His children. Jesus emphasized this truth by both example and precept.

The Praying Christ. We are not to assume that Christ prayed merely to set an example for us. Prayer in His life expressed His own intimate communion with the Heavenly Father. Prayer was one of those spiritual exercises by which He was enabled to fulfill His mission on the earth. Alfred Plummer once wrote: "If in such a life as His there was room for prayer, much more must there be room and need in such lives as ours." In several ways from His own prayer life Christ shows us the importance of prayer in the Kingdom life.

First, the Gospels clearly indicate that *Jesus communed with the Father privately*. Matt. 14:23 reads: "And when he had sent the multitudes away, he went up into a mountain apart to pray: and when the evening was come, he was there alone." Luke 5:16 refers to another time when He pulled himself away from the crowds to pray. Both of these references speak of Him praying after a strenuous day of serving the needy folk who pressed His path. Noteworthy is the fact that it was the disciples' observance of Jesus at prayer that moved them to ask Him to teach them to pray. In response the Master taught them "The Lord's Prayer" (Luke 11:1-4). Jesus also prayed early in the morning before the mad rush of the day had begun. Mark 1:32-34 gives us some indication of the busyness of the Master's life. Scores of people listened to His message and pled with Him for healing. His life, indeed, was an exhausting one, physically and spiritually. No wonder therefore He rose "a great while before day"

¹⁴*Op. cit.*, pp. 113-14.

and found a solitary place in which to pray (Mark 1:35). He needed the resourcefulness of mind and spirit which that trust at dawn would provide.

Second, in prayer *Jesus expressed thanks unto God for the daily provisions of life and for divine assistance in His work.* On the two occasions when He fed the multitudes, He took the fish and loaves and blessed them before the distribution. He recognized the providential care of the Heavenly Father. According to Matt. 11:25-26, after Jesus had pronounced doom on the indifferent Galilean towns, He thanked God for "the little ones," that is to say, the ones lacking scribal wisdom, but who wholeheartedly received the truth which He preached. In John 11:41-42 it is recorded that the Master offered a prayer of thanks for the consciousness of assured communion with God. He declared, "Father, I thank thee that thou hast heard me. And I knew that thou hearest me always."

Third, *Jesus interceded for others in His prayers.* "Then were there brought unto him little children, that he should put his hands on them, and pray: and the disciples rebuked them" (Matt. 19:13). Despite the action of the impetuous disciples, Jesus blessed the children. To Him, at their tender age they shared in the benefits of the Kingdom which was being inaugurated through His life and death. Thus they merited His attention and concern.

The Master petitioned the Father in behalf of His leading follower. Just before Peter betrayed Him, Jesus said to the Big Fisherman, "I have prayed for thee, that thy faith fail not: and when thou art converted, strengthen thy brethren" (Luke 22:32). Here we see Jesus as the great Intercessor. As the Head of the body, the Church, as the Leader in "the new and living way" which He opened up, as the Author and

Perfector of our faith, "he ever liveth to make intercession" for us too (Heb. 7:25).

In no less poignant terms, John preserves for us some of our Lord's intercession for others. "I will pray the Father, and he shall give you another Comforter" (John 14:16). This prayer was uttered in behalf of the disciples, who needed desperately the cleansing power of the Holy Spirit in their lives. In John 17, the Lord offers His high-priestly prayer in which He pleads for the sanctification of His intimate followers (17:17). But at the same time He commits himself to the atoning death outside Jerusalem that all men might know the riches of God's grace in cleansing and purity.

Fourth, *prayer played an important part in the life of Jesus whenever He faced a decision or time of crisis in His ministry.* The historian Luke, who emphasizes the prayer life of our Lord, records some notes in connection with some of these critical moments. When Jesus went to be baptized by John the Baptist, He prayed (Luke 3:21). Perhaps Jesus was conscious that this was the moment when He must accept His Messianic role. Knowing what that meant, He was hesitant. But He prayed as His body was immersed. When He came out of the Jordan, the voice from heaven assured Him of His sonship and the Holy Spirit endowed Him for messiahship.

Luke 6:12-13 tells us that the Master communed with the Father the entire night before choosing the 12 disciples. The reaction of the religious leaders to His Sabbath healings made it necessary for Jesus to draw His circle of adherents into closer relations with himself. The long vigil in prayer was preparation for the solemn choice.

The confession of Peter and Jesus' first prediction

of His death took place at a time when Jesus' spirit was deeply prayerful (Luke 9:18 ff.). No doubt our Lord was petitioning the Father to reveal the truth about himself to His disciples. He also knew that He could no longer veil the nature of His mission in the world. As the record indicates, the disciples failed to comprehend fully what Jesus attempted to tell them about His foreordained crucifixion.

With regard to the Transfiguration episode, Luke notes, "And as he prayed, the fashion of his countenance was altered, and his raiment was white and glistering" (9:29). The Transfiguration took place during a prayer meeting. Barclay has written that "at Caesarea Philippi Jesus put himself to the test of *human recognition*; on the Mount of Transfiguration he put himself to the test of *divine approval*." And the approval came. Though the disciples wanted to remain on the mountain, Jesus moved immediately into the valley to meet the needs of bruised and broken humanity. Prayer had strengthened His heart.

Fifth, *the whole of Christ's life was dedicated to the redemption of men*. Because of this His prayer life was mainly devoted to the same cause. In the Gethsemane Garden prayer, the issue revolved around the cup of suffering. He pleaded with the Father in agony and in bloody sweat to let the cup pass from Him. But when Jesus realized anew that the hope of man's redemption would be obliterated if He did not drink the cup, He yielded: "Nevertheless not as I will, but as thou wilt" (Matt. 26:39 and parallels). Having consecrated himself afresh to His earthly mission, Jesus took courage and went on to Calvary's redeeming cross. That submissive spirit evidenced itself again outside Jerusalem. "Then said Jesus, Father, forgive them; for they know not what they do" (Luke 23:34). This prayer embraced the cruel Roman soldiers, the mocking

crowd, the unforgiving Jewish leaders, and every member of Adam's race.

The Praying Disciple. Beyond the example of the Lord in prayer, there are instructions in the nature and form of prayer to be found in the teachings of Jesus. He recognized that men need guidance in this spiritual exercise, so upon occasion He offered advice, and He expected His disciples to engage in prayer. For Him, prayer must never be reduced to a formal, religious art, but must be maintained as the normal expression of an intense personal piety.

First, Jesus asserted that prayer was more than "a devotional ritual with subjective values." It was *an actual source of daily material and spiritual provisions*. "Ask, and it shall be given you; seek, and ye shall find; knock, and it shall be opened unto you: for every one that asketh receiveth; and he that seeketh findeth; and to him that knocketh it shall be opened. . . . If ye then, being evil, know how to give good gifts unto your children, how much more shall your Father which is in heaven give good things to them that ask him?" (Matt. 7:7-11) On another occasion Jesus was much more emphatic: "If ye have faith as a grain of mustard seed, ye shall say unto this mountain, Remove hence to yonder place; and it shall remove; and nothing shall be impossible unto you" (Matt. 17:20). Moreover, He left no doubt when He declared, "What things soever ye desire, when ye pray, believe that ye receive them, and ye shall have them" (Mark 11:24). Branscomb concludes, "For he knew that the reason men do not pray is that they do not believe that anything will be accomplished by it."¹⁵

Second, the Master taught that prayer is essentially *a personal experience*. This is why He inveighed against

¹⁵*The Teachings of Jesus*, p. 269.

the public displays in prayer by the religionists of Palestine. "When thou prayest, thou shalt not be as the hypocrites are: for they love to pray standing in the synagogues and in the corners of the street, that they may be seen of men. . . . But thou, when thou prayest, enter into thy closet, and when thou hast shut thy door, pray to thy Father which is in secret, and thy Father which seeth in secret shall reward thee openly" (Matt. 6:5-6). See also Jesus' parable of the Pharisee and publican in Luke 18:10-14. The Master had no objection to public prayer; He simply pled for all prayer to be a meeting between a man and God. Prayer must always be addressed to God, the Divine Person, and not to men, as so often is the case with public prayer. The leader must understand that he is presenting personally to the Father the needs of the congregation. On the other hand, there are times when prayer must be private, a tryst between the individual soul and God. Alone, away from the public gaze and the ears of others, the disciple can express his inmost needs to God and have his soul refreshed by the reassuring presence of the Father.

Third, Jesus viewed true prayer as *simple and brief*. "When ye pray, use not vain repetitions, as the heathen [Gentiles] do: for they think that they shall be heard for their much speaking. Be not ye therefore like unto them: for your Father knoweth what things ye have need of, before ye ask him" (Matt. 6:7-8). Prayer is not a conversation in which we inform God of our needs or the conditions of the world, nor a persuasive speech by which we attempt to wheedle something out of Him. Whenever prayer is so viewed, it becomes a ritual without meaning because it is man-centered and selfish. Genuine prayer is an act of communion in which the disciple seeks to align his spirit with the spirit of God and likewise to find the will of God for any moment

of his life. As such, prayer becomes a time of listening for the instruction and encouragement of the Father.

Fourth, Jesus called for *persistence* in prayer. The parable of the friend at midnight (Luke 11:5-8) and the parable of the importunate widow (Luke 18:1-7) speak eloquently to this point of insistent and unceasing endeavor to receive God's answer to a need. The latter story is introduced with this note: "Men ought always to pray, and not to faint" (Luke 18:1). Even though the divine answer is delayed, one must go on praying and entertain no doubts that God knows and cares and will respond. Most certainly there must be no begging and cajoling, but quiet seeking of God's will. Not to pray, however, is to lose courage and faith.

Fifth, Jesus offered, upon request of the disciples, a *model* for prayer (Matt. 6:9-13; Luke 11:2-4). Though known traditionally as the Lord's Prayer, it is more properly the Disciples' Prayer or the Prayer of Believers. The address of this prayer is to "our Father." Jesus brought a deep sense of the fatherhood of God to the man of His day. Though the Infinite One, God desires this affectionate intimacy with His children. Six petitions are identifiable in this prayer: (1) the hallowing of God's name, a safeguard against any undue familiarity and disrespect; (2) the coming of the Kingdom, an expectation of the fulfillment of the reign of God; (3) the accomplishing of God's will on the earth, a change of man's total existence under God;¹⁶ (4) the providing of daily physical necessities, an acknowledgment of God's providential concern; (5) the forgiving of sins (see Luke 11:4), an assured way of maintaining a reconciled relationship with God and man; and (6) the protecting and delivering of the petitioner in the

¹⁶This clause was interpreted by John Wesley as a basic verse in the doctrine of Christian perfection. See *Explanatory Notes upon the New Testament* (London: Epworth Press, 1941, reprint).

vicissitudes of life, a plea for strength to stand true to God (see Matt. 18:14; Eph. 6:11-18).

THE PERFECT LIFE

The evangelistic thrust of the message of Jesus was twofold. He preached the good news of the inbreak of the kingdom of God with its promise of newness of life for sinners. He set forth the conditions for enjoying this life, which are repentance and faith (Mark 1:14-15). Since His presence was the evidence and power of the Kingdom, needy men must come to Him. He entreated: "Come unto me, all ye that labour and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest" (Matt. 11:28).

The Lord also called His disciples to a deeper relationship with God, which is explicitly designated as the perfect life in Matt. 5:48: "Be ye therefore perfect, even as your Father which is in heaven is perfect." It is important to note that much of what Jesus enjoined was a reflection against the background of the superficial commitments of His contemporaries, who sought above all else to preserve their laws, customs, and religious practices but at the same time neglected the call of God to uttermost commitment of heart to Him. Herein lies the core of Christ's message to His disciples. Perfection therefore relates to the motivational and dispositional dimensions of the person. Pure motives and right attitudes constitute the essence of this perfection (see Matt. 5:8; Luke 11:34-36).

Several aspects of the invitation of Christ to the perfect life are noteworthy. First, for the disciples *this call is not optional*. Jesus commands His followers to be perfect. Moreover, the command is quite explicit. He does not charge, "Be ye once in a while perfect," or, "Be ye hopefully perfect," but, "Be ye perfect right now and always."

Second, *God is the Standard* or Guide for this

perfection: "even as your Father which is in heaven is perfect."¹⁷ This would be a "hard saying," if not an incredibly unjust one, if it meant that the Christian perfection of finite men must match the absolute perfection of Deity. What Christ here enjoins is that, as God is perfect to the degree of His being, so must we be perfect on the level or to the degree of our finite beings. Needless to say, such a declaration acknowledges the marvelous possibilities of the human spirit to live righteously and holily. This perfection, paradoxically, is relative to the purpose for which man was created. "To walk with God in love" is the purpose of man's life, and to fulfill that purpose is to be perfect.

Third, *perfection consists in a state of love*. "Therefore" in Matt. 5:48 points back to the preceding verses which speak of Christian love but especially the Father's perfect love. "He maketh his sun to rise on the evil and on the good, and sendeth rain on the just and on the unjust" (5:45). William Greathouse has written: "God's love is not conditioned by its object: it flows out of His being." God does not calculate whom He will love; He just loves everyone. There are no ulterior motives in His love. Unmotivated by personal desires, God's love goes forth to win all men. Indeed, it reaches out to those who are hostile and rebellious and seeks to win them to himself. John in his writings expresses this truth in unforgettable words: "Herein is love, not that we loved God, but that he loved us, and sent his Son to be the propitiation for our sins. We love him,

¹⁷See Lev. 11:44; 19:2; 20:7, 26; Num. 15:40, where the command is to be holy as God is holy. T. W. Manson asserts that for the Hebrew of Old Testament times "the last ground of moral obligation is the command of God; and the supreme ideal is the imitation of a God who is at once king and father, who exhibits the qualities of holiness and righteousness, mercy and faithfulness, love and covenant loyalty" (*Ethics and the Gospel*, p. 19).

because he first loved us" (I John 4:10, 19). It is therefore in love that we are made perfect. This love is not a natural quality of the human spirit. It is a gift of God. The Holy Spirit "pours" it into our hearts, as Paul declares (Rom. 5:5). John also writes: "God is love; and he that dwelleth in love dwelleth in God, and God in him" (I John 4:16).

Fourth, *perfection of love results from the sanctifying work of the Spirit*. As long as the heart of a disciple harbors selfish traits, love cannot be perfected. So it was that Jesus prayed: "Sanctify them through thy truth: thy word is truth" (John 17:17). This eloquent intercessory prayer closes with a reiteration of the Son's ultimate desire: "That the love wherewith thou hast loved me may be in them, and I in them" (17:26). The coming of the Holy Spirit at Pentecost was the disciples' experience of this fullness of divine love as the Holy Spirit was poured out upon them. (1) Perfection of love makes for unity in the life of the people of God. Jesus' analogy of the vine and the branches, recorded in John 15, teaches that all who are in Christ are one. (2) Perfection of love produces "much fruit"; that is to say, it provokes those qualities of spirit and action which are winsome. Jesus asserted: "Every branch in me that beareth not fruit he taketh away: and every branch that beareth fruit, he purgeth it, that it may bring forth more fruit" (John 15:2; see verse 5).

Thomas Cook summarizes well what Jesus taught. "Perfection signifies that spiritual completeness or wholeness into which the soul enters when the last inward foe is conquered, and the last distracting force harmonized with the mighty love of Christ, every crevice of the nature filled with love, and every energy employed in the delightful service of our adorable Saviour."¹⁸

¹⁸*New Testament Holiness* (London: Epworth Press, 1902), p. 57.

QUESTIONS FOR DISCUSSION

1. Psychologically, is it really possible to forgive a person as many times as Jesus demanded? Seventy times seven?

2. Is love an adequate principle for determining one's action in ethical situations?

3. What is the point of Jesus' objection to repetitious prayers in Matt. 6:6-7? Is this word a guide for us in the matter of prayer?

4. How is the call of Christ to perfection a genuine possibility in this life? In what sense can we speak of perfection in Christian experience and living?

5. Discuss the principle of returning good for evil. Is it really practical in our society? Did Jesus return good for evil? What about taking matters to the lawcourts? Is this returning evil for evil?

6. Discuss the practices in our society which make it difficult for a Christian to be honest and to maintain his integrity.

The Stewardship of the Kingdom Life

*Whosoever of you will be the chiefest,
shall be servant of all (Mark 10:44).*

Jesus lifted the hopes of His people in proclaiming the nearness of the kingdom of God. The Kingdom's power was being cast ahead of its full-orbed manifestation and men were entering the Kingdom now. Nevertheless, its consummation still lay in the future. But the fact that needy men could enjoy its life-giving blessing now provoked great expectations with regard to its fulfillment. Thus the born-again members of the kingly rule were oriented toward the future. However, in the mind of the Lord this spiritual posture did not mean irresponsibility in the present life. Jesus called for perfect obedience to the will of God here and now in light of that which would transpire in the future. His followers were expected to be faithful stewards in this present world.

THE PRINCIPLES OF SERVICE

Once again, it must be recognized that Christ himself sets the standard of service. Of himself He declared: "For even the Son of man came not to be ministered

unto [to be served], but to minister [to serve], and to give his life a ransom for many" (Mark 10:45). He startled the men of His day and even His disciples by this "reversal of roles." Men of this world seek to exercise lordship over others, to dominate them for one's own benefit. Not so with those of the Kingdom. "But whosoever will be great among you, shall be your minister [servant]" (Mark 10:43). Authority in the Kingdom goes not to the served but to those who serve. "In God's kingdom the measure of greatness is the measure of service."¹

Kingdom living is servant living. For Kingdom men the deepest joy and the greatest good lie in seeking to meet the spiritual and material needs of others. It is the possession of the divine love that makes such trustworthy servants in all the areas of life, political, familial, and economic.

THE STATE

First-century Judaism presented a tragic picture of political confusion and unrest. Tension prevailed between the several sects in Judaism and the Herods, who were the local political puppets of Rome, and the whole Roman domination created tension. Taxation alone made it a period of continual national crisis. There was also the incongruity between their faith in being a people under God and the existing subordination to Rome. The Zealots, along with the Sicarii, who played a prominent part in the First Jewish Revolt (A.D. 66-73) against Rome, even in Jesus' lifetime counseled and prepared for revolution. History has shown that the ill-timed efforts of these freedom fighters only brought chaos for the people. The Essenes, who are identified with the famous Dead Sea Scrolls found in 1947, resisted the Romans too, but they only organized themselves

¹Saunders, *op. cit.*, p. 148.

for the battle which God would initiate. Some scholars have concluded that at a later time they joined the Zealots, who sought to precipitate the final life-and-death struggle with the demonic enemy, Rome.

The Pharisees, on the other hand, were much more cautious in their attitude toward the existing political situation. No less anxious for deliverance, they still favored waiting for God's time, for He was well able to manage matters. The wealthy Sadducees, who controlled both the Sanhedrin, the highest religious and political court of Jesus' time, and the Temple, minimized the problems arising from the Roman overrule and tended to advocate a position of peaceful coexistence with the Romans.

Behind this festering condition was the religiously sanctioned view of these resistance movements that the coming kingdom of God was a this-worldly, political order. All human civil orders, therefore, were suspect; they should and would be destroyed. The only acceptable state would be theocratic, one in which God is King and His people the proper political rulers in the world. It appears that the disciples held this same view, even after the Resurrection. "When they therefore were come together, they asked of him, saying, Lord, wilt thou at this time restore again the kingdom to Israel?" (Acts 1:6)

Jesus' Involvement with the State. Consistently, the Master refused to promote any political programs. William Lillie conjectures that Jesus in His temptations may have been attracted "by the Zealot dream of a free Jewish theocracy, for these were largely temptations to use the common means of the politician—economic advantage, showmanship, and sheer force—in establishing the promised kingdom."² While this interpretation

²*Studies in New Testament Ethics* (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1961), p. 83.

might be too extreme, it nevertheless properly emphasizes the fact that the central issue in the testings was the mode by which Jesus would achieve His mission in the world. As the Bringer of the righteous rule of God, Jesus necessarily would be uniquely related to the existing order.

The effect of the miraculous works of the Master upon the people was to excite in them notions about the consummation of the kingdom of God now among them. Such was the public reaction to His feeding of the 5,000. According to the account in John's Gospel, they sought "to make him a king," but He slipped away into a mountain when He perceived what was developing (John 6:15). In this same connection, it might well have been that His disciples entertained similar ideas. One of them carried a sword in the garden the night of Christ's arrest. The Master, even at that tense moment, disclaimed any revolutionary ideas which involved the use of physical force. "For all they that take the sword shall perish with the sword" (Matt. 26:52). His intention was not to establish an earthly kingdom.

Pilate was indeed puzzled with the accusation which had been levelled against Jesus by the religious leaders. "We found this fellow perverting the nation, and forbidding to give tribute to Caesar, saying that he himself is Christ a King" (Luke 23:2). Lillie asserts that this charge was similar to what "informers would make against a Zealot, and although Pilate knew in his heart that Jesus was no Zealot, the titulus [title] on the Cross showed that Jesus was condemned for the characteristically Zealot crime of claiming to be 'King of the Jews.'"³ When Pilate questioned Jesus directly as to whether or not He was the King of the Jews, the Master's reply, as recorded by the four Gospels,

³*Ibid.*, p. 83.

was threefold. (1) "Thou sayest it," which in effect was an affirmative answer. McNeile says that this seems to imply: "Thou art verbally correct, but the truth is beyond thy comprehension."⁴ (2) Jesus inquired as to whether Pilate was inquiring for his own information or for others (John 18:34). (3) Our Lord asserted that His kingdom was not of this world. If it had been this-worldly, His servants would have fought for Him. His kingship, on the other hand, had to do with bearing witness to the truth of God (John 18:37).

With regard to this encounter with Pilate and the response of Jesus to the procurator, Lillie sees the true relationship of the kingdom of God to earthly kingdoms. He writes: "The function of the Christian Church facing the rulers of this world is to proclaim the truth, primarily the good news of salvation, but also the true condemnation of what is wrong. . . ."⁵

Jesus' Attitude Toward the Romans. At the points at which Jesus' behavior and teachings conflicted with the Jewish hopes of the restoration of the kingdom of God on earth, the Master avoided anything that would show Him to be a revolutionary. His view of God's rule would not permit such action. Likewise, He shows "a complete lack of any anti-Roman prejudice or feeling."⁶ He paid taxes (Matt. 17:24-27) and He instructed the religious leaders that they should do likewise (Mark 12:13-17).

This latter incident "gives us a surer insight into Jesus' attitude toward the state." At Passover time the Pharisees and Herodians, who normally would not be

⁴*The Gospel According to St. Matthew* (London: The Macmillan Co., 1915), p. 409.

⁵*Op. cit.*, p. 84.

⁶Branscomb, *The Teachings of Jesus*, p. 324.

caught espousing the same cause, came to the Master and asked Him: "Is it lawful to give tribute to Caesar or not?" Obviously, the question was intended to pose a dilemma for the Master. If He should tell them not to pay the tax, He would fall under the hand of the Roman governor, Pilate. Conversely, if He supported the taxation, He would alienate His own people.⁷ The whole tax business stirred the hearts of the freedom-loving Jews. Jesus' reply was clever. He asked for a "penny," a *denarius*, worth about 20 cents, the amount of the usual poll tax. Taking it in His hand, He inquired as to whose image and superscription appeared on it. This question boded only embarrassment, for His inquirers were carrying around in their pockets images of Caesar. Image making was generally frowned upon in Israel's history. On one side of the coin appeared the words: "Tiberius Caesar Augustus son of the divine Augustus"; on the reverse: "High Priest." To these people this was sheer idolatry, for the Caesars were revered across the Roman world as saviors and lords. Furthermore, the Master implied that by their daily use of coinage in their business transactions they were benefiting from it.

Jesus said, "Render to Caesar the things that are Caesar's, and to God the things that are God's" (Mark 12:17). Two aspects of His teachings regarding relationships to the state are found in His famous statement. First, when one received benefits from the state, as was the case with the Jews at that time, the state can make some demands. Saunders says: "It is certain enough that Jesus recognized the legal and moral responsibility of the citizen and provincial [*sic*]

⁷Thirty to 40 percent of family income went to taxes. The *tributum*, which included land and head taxes, was paid directly to Roman collectors. The *publicum*, a tax levied on sales, customs, deliverance from slavery, etc., was collected by the publicans, who were Jewish servants of the Roman government.

to support the government by the payment of taxes."⁸ He goes on to point out that "however disgruntled the subjugated Jew might be, he could not deny the benefits of a dependable and peaceful social order."⁹ Responsible political participation is thus demanded of every Christian believer.

Second, Jesus made it clear that there is "a sphere where God and not Caesar is the master." This area is not indicated by Christ at this time. But in all likelihood the Christians understood at a later time what He meant when they found themselves confronted with the demand that they worship the emperor of Rome. They unequivocally refused to do so. Tertullian has commented: "Give to God what is God's—His image in man, yourself." Jesus is thus saying, "Your whole life—body, soul, and spirit, has been stamped with the divine image. You are thus debtor to Him. Give God what is due Him."¹⁰

FAMILY LIFE

The Jews were conspicuous in the ancient world for their strong emphasis upon the primacy of the family among the social institutions. Reverence for the family was taught from the earliest days of Hebrew history, and the synagogues of Jesus day did not diminish that emphasis. Since each family was considered a unit, it was customary to keep the family genealogy. Great pride was taken in one's family stock. Priestly duties were fulfilled by members of particular clans and there could be no mistake as to family identity in this regard. Such devotion is indicated in the fact that one of the Ten Commandments calls for the honoring of

⁸*Op. cit.*, p. 228.

⁹*Ibid.*

¹⁰See James Stewart, *op. cit.*, p. 133.

father and mother (Exod. 20:12). The appreciation for familial relations in Jesus' day is evident from the genealogies of His own family found in Matthew and Luke. At the time of His birth, Mary and Joseph went to their ancestral home to be enrolled for the taxation under Caesar Augustus (Luke 2:1-5). Local authorities could use whatever means desirable for determining the tax procedure. For Palestine, requiring the people to return to their hometowns seemed most feasible because of this persistent habit of keeping the family records up-to-date. Jesus' own attitude toward the family had its origin in this reverence which He, no doubt, was taught by the local rabbi of Nazareth. Also, He demonstrated the same loyalty in His own family over a period of 30 years. Jesus recognized family obligations by working as a Carpenter (Mark 6:3) and thus supporting His mother and the other children. On the Cross, He was sensitive enough to remember to commit His mother to the care of John, the Beloved Disciple (John 19:25-27).

A Type of the Kingdom. Jesus explained the nature of God and the Kingdom, using the finer teachings of Judaism on the relations of the family. "God is not like a priest, or king, or judge, or artist; he is like a father of children."¹¹ Furthermore, the ideal relation between members of the Kingdom is like that of brothers and sisters. "Whosoever shall do the will of God, the same is my brother, and my sister, and mother" (Mark 3:35). After criticizing the behavior of the scribes and Pharisees, who sought to be called, "Rabbi," by the common people, the Lord said to His disciples: "But be not ye called Rabbi: for one is your Master [Teacher], even Christ; and all ye are brethren" (Matt. 23:8). In addition, as Stewart points out, the greatest of all the parables, the prodigal son, is a story of home

¹¹Branscomb, *The New Testament*, p. 233.

life (Luke 15:11-32). "The human family becomes a microcosm of the heavenly kingdom."¹²

A Defense of the Family. Mark preserves for us Jesus' condemnation of a common practice among the Jews which represented an attack upon the dignity of the family (7:10-13). Apparently it was permissible for the people to use a dedicatory word, "Corban" (offering), as an oath or vow confirming a resolution. For example, a man might say, "Corban! if I ever again plow my field with your cow." This "Corban casuistry" was being used, according to Mark's account, to evade the fifth commandment, which called for the honoring of one's father and mother. An angry son could escape the responsibility of caring financially for his folk by contributing to the Temple that money which would go to his parent's support. He did it simply by saying, "Corban." In effect he was declaring, "This money with which I might have helped you has been dedicated to God."¹³ The vow thus taken was binding for life. Jesus warned that their permission of this practice made the word of God of none effect (7:13).

Obviously, this conduct had other serious consequences. (1) It provided a means whereby selfish children might escape the care of their parents. (2) The permanency of the vow stood as a barrier to a repentant son who viewed things differently at a later time.¹⁴ (3) Such injustice in the guise of piety undermined the stability of the home, since it violated the fundamental law of showing respect and love for parents. Anything which tends to break down the lines of communication and responsibility between the members of

¹²*Op. cit.*, p. 127.

¹³A. Elwood Sanner, "The Gospel According to Mark," *Beacon Bible Commentary* (Kansas City: Beacon Hill Press, 1964), VI, 330.

¹⁴*Ibid.*

the home falls under the condemnation of God. Every member of the Kingdom has a stewardship of family relationships. He must seek to maintain the unity of the home.

The Solicitude for Children. Children in the ancient world were so numerous, and considered so unimportant, that they received little attention from the adult world. Very little sympathy was expended on these delicate lives, especially females. A letter dated 1 B.C. and written by a husband in foreign service to his expectant wife at home said: "Let me tell you that we are still in Alexandria. I beg you to look after the child, and as soon as we get wages I will send you something. If it is a boy, let it alone. If it is a girl, throw it away."

Jesus' actions and teachings regarding children represent a complete reversal of this unconcerned, indeed calloused, attitude. Branscomb thinks that the tenderness which the Lord displays goes back to His own childhood and youth. Tradition has it that Joseph died fairly early in Jesus' life, so the responsibility of rearing the children fell on Jesus' shoulders. It is assumed that Mary's household was teeming with children—six, seven, maybe eight of them. This might account, also, for the frequent reference of the Lord to the activity of children, such as playing wedding or funeral in the marketplace.¹⁵

From the Gospels we learn several things concerning Jesus' attitude toward children. First, as Lillie rightly observes, "Children are part of the holy people of God, and are to be treated as such."¹⁶ The very fact that in tenderness He gathered the children to himself, took them up into His arms, and blessed them

¹⁵Branscomb, *The Teachings of Jesus*, p. 234; see Matt. 11: 16-17.

¹⁶*Op. cit.*, p. 129.

implies that they can be truly members of His Church. Jesus rebuked the disciples who shortsightedly tried to keep parents from bringing their children into His presence that He might lay His hands on them (Mark 10:13-16). Oftentimes the Church today has taken the disciples' limited view of the children's right to be genuinely involved in the Lord's community of believers. The Master, however, speaks of a strange identification between himself and children: "Whoso shall receive one such little child in my name receiveth me" (Matt. 18:5). Earle comments: "The one who rejects a child rejects Christ."¹⁷

Second, the child is "the pattern of the entrant into the kingdom." Jesus declared: "Whosoever shall not receive the kingdom of God as a little child, he shall not enter therein" (Mark 10:15; see Matt. 19:13-15; Luke 18:15-17). Membership in the kingdom of God belongs to those who have the qualities of a child. In his littleness and helplessness a child is receptive and trustful. Most important, he has the "capacity to act at once" upon what he understands. There is a "willingness to be reoriented radically and to accept a new kind of life."

Third, to cause a child to stumble or be ensnared by sin is as serious an offense as any major social criminal act. Jesus warned: "It were better for him that a millstone were hanged about his neck, and he were cast into the sea, than that he should offend one of these little ones" (Luke 17:2). The millstone would prevent the body from rising to the surface, so friends might give it a decent burial. Such a person is not fit for even that consideration. What a responsibility rests upon adult Christians! Our lives must bear consistent witness to children that we possess the righteous life of the Kingdom!

¹⁷"The Gospel According to Matthew," *Beacon Bible Commentary* (Kansas City: Beacon Hill Press, 1964), VI, 168.

Marriage and Divorce. While Jesus did not marry, He did not promulgate any abnormal views against marriage. He attended a wedding in Cana of Galilee with His mother and disciples and performed a miracle there in order to continue the festivities (John 2:1-11). The central theme of His ministry—the coming of the kingdom of God—is depicted in terms of a marriage feast, which a King gave in behalf of his son. One guest, who was not properly attired for the occasion, was cast out by the king (Matt. 22:1-14). Jesus' most penetrating parable on the Second Coming is the parable of the ten virgins, and its setting is that of a wedding (Matt. 25:1-13). In a controversy with the Sadducees, who held no belief in the resurrection, the Master asserted that "they which shall be accounted worthy to obtain that world, and the resurrection from the dead, neither marry, nor are given in marriage: neither can they die any more: for they are equal unto the angels; and are the children of God, being the children of the resurrection" (Luke 20:35-36). Childers interprets this verse as follows: "Marriage will not be needed after the resurrection, for all men will be immortal. The purpose of marriage is to repopulate the earth, to replace those who die; after the resurrection people will no more die, so they will not need to be replaced."¹⁸

The point at which the Master expressed His mind most explicitly on this subject was in connection with a debate on divorce (Mark 10:2-12; see also Matt. 5:31, 32; 19:3-9; Luke 16:18). The question the Pharisees put to Jesus was: "Is it lawful for a man to put away his wife?" (Mark 10:2) The reply of the Lord has many facets.

(1) First, He has them recall that Moses permitted a man to write out a statement of divorce and give it

¹⁸"The Gospel According to Luke," *Beacon Bible Commentary* (Kansas City: Beacon Hill Press, 1964), VI, 589-90.

to his wife (Deut. 24:1-4). Among Jews at that time divorce was a private legal act which did not require confirmation by a court. Perhaps, as Earle suggests, Moses tried to make the matter of divorce more difficult by requiring the man to employ a scribe to draw up a written document instead of simply verbally divorcing his wife.¹⁹

(2) Jesus went on to assert that Moses permitted divorce because of "the hardness of your heart," a spiritual condition which kept them from meeting God's original intention as far as marriage was concerned. The Pharisees had taken the words of Moses as granting autocratic rights to the husband. Much debate prevailed among the rabbis over the verse in Deuteronomy which gave the husband the privilege of granting his wife "a bill of divorcement" because he found some "unseemly thing in her." Matthew's inclusion of the little phrase "for every cause" in the question asked by the Pharisees highlights the controversy. The School of Shammai restricted the meaning of "unseemly thing" to acts of unchastity, whereas the School of Hillel gave it wider interpretation so as to cover almost anything that caused disfavor with the husband, even such a small matter as letting his food burn.

In reality, the intention of Moses was not to introduce loose practices among the men, but rather to give permission to a woman to remarry. Sanner remarks: "It was rather a merciful provision in a day when womanhood had no rights."²⁰ Thus, as Branscomb observes, "He [Jesus] challenged their whole man-made system of superiority, the unjust power of divorce which they wielded, the cruel inferiority and dependence which were forced upon woman."²¹ It is

¹⁹*Op. cit.*, p. 177.

²⁰*Op. cit.*, p. 354.

²¹*The Teachings of Jesus*, p. 243.

on this very point that we see Jesus' emancipation of womanhood and His crowning it with dignity and honor.

(3) The Master then moved on to state the divine ideal in marriage. He quotes two other passages from Moses, which naturally carried the same authority as the Deuteronomy text. (a) "From the beginning of creation God made them male and female" is taken from Gen. 1:27. (b) "For this cause shall a man leave his father and mother, and cleave to his wife" repeats Gen. 2:24. The thrust of this appeal to Old Testament teaching which is prior to Moses' concession on divorce is threefold. First, by creation God intended for man and woman to be united. Second, when a man leaves his own home and takes a wife, he is expected to "cleave" (literally, "stick to" like glue) to her. The Apostle Paul so understood the teachings of the Lord, according to I Cor. 7:10, 11: "And unto the married I command, yet not I, but the Lord, Let not the wife depart from her husband: but and if she depart, let her remain unmarried, or be reconciled to her husband: and let not the husband put away his wife." Third, marriage is "a union of lives for life."²² The bride and the groom are not entering into a contract but a union, which has permanency because it involves their very nature: "So then they are no more twain, but one flesh." Thus Branscomb concludes that "the bond is so sacred and intimate that it holds even though they be separate from each other. Whether we like it or not, that seems to be Jesus' teaching."²³

(c) The Lord finished His response to the questions by warning men not to find ways to destroy the union which God ordained should exist between husband and wife (Mark 10:9).

²²*Ibid.*, p. 241.

²³*Ibid.*

Two other aspects of Jesus' teaching need to be clarified. (1) Matthew's statement of Jesus on divorce includes an important exception. "Whosoever shall put away his wife, *except it be for fornication*, and shall marry another, committeth adultery" (19:9; 5:32). "Fornication" here means adultery. For one party to give himself sexually to another outside the marital relationship is tantamount to destroying the original marriage bond. Divorce would then be the legal recognition of the fact that the union no longer exists between the husband and wife. From God's viewpoint, and indeed from the standpoint of modern psychology, a man cannot be wholesomely bound to two partners. This is one of the supports for the monogamous marital pattern advocated by Jews and Christians. It appears that the only divinely acceptable basis for divorce is adultery.

(2) Remarriage came into the discussion on divorce when the disciples explored the matter further with Jesus (Mark 10:10-12). Mark's record, which omits the qualifying exception clause of Matthew, asserts that to remarry after divorce would be adultery, whether from the husband's or wife's action. Since marriage is indissoluble save by death, remarriage would necessarily be adultery and should not be entered into. However, the converse of the exception clause in Matt. 19:9 implies that one can remarry and not commit adultery if the previous marriage was revoked by the participation of the guilty member in adultery. The innocent party would not be penalized because of the failure of the other.

In conclusion, we must realize that the Lord was dealing with a people among whom astonishing freedom of divorce was granted only to the husbands and for that reason the "bill of divorcement" was abused. Moreover, permanency of marriage is absolutely necessary for the well-being of any society. A separation

anytime means tragic failure and the consequences are beyond our comprehension. Branscomb is right when he says that separation and divorce "should be the very last resort, and be entered only with sadness and a sense of shameful failure."²⁴ Over and beyond these facts is the central message of our Lord that reborn men and women can have the grace and love of God to help them live as good mates and thus avoid the breakdown of the home and family.

Family Obligations and the Kingdom. One other dimension of Jesus' teaching on the family relates to the decision a member of the Kingdom must make when family obligations and Kingdom stewardship clash. From Jesus' own life we learn that at a certain period He subordinated His family responsibilities to a secondary role. Doing His Father's will was always primary. Even at the tender age of 12 He showed some independence of His parents by remaining in the Temple for discussions with the learned rabbis there. "Wist ye not that I must be about my Father's business?" He questioned His parents (Luke 2:41-52). Later in His ministry He refused to return to Nazareth upon demand of His mother and brothers, who seemed to think He was demented (Mark 3:21; 31-34). John's Gospel notes one occasion when His natural brothers attempted to get Him to go up to the Feast of Tabernacles for the purpose of showing His miraculous power. Despite their insistence, Jesus chose not to go publicly with the caravan but privately (John 7:1-10).

What the Lord practiced was reinforced by what He taught concerning the subordinate position of the family to the Kingdom. His language is frightening, but it can be reconciled to the highest regard for the family. To enjoy the Kingdom life one must be willing to leave father and mother and brethren and lands and

²⁴*Ibid.*, p. 243.

houses and follow Christ. To those who pled for time to fulfill filial duties, such as burying one's father or saying farewell to the family, Jesus replied, "Leave those cares to others" (see Luke 9:57-62). Though this response of the Master seems unduly harsh to us, the real issue in each case was the need for an all-out decision for Christ. Postponement of a decision until one's father died might be dangerous. One's attention might be diverted back to worldly concerns. This is the effect of Jesus' word: "No man, having put his hand to the plow, and looking back, is fit for the kingdom of God" (Luke 9:62). Lillie concludes: "Not even the most sacred family obligation must come in the way of allegiance to Christ."²⁵

Most perplexing of Jesus' teachings is the suggestion that discipleship will introduce strife into the family and that "a man's foes shall be they of his own household" (Matt. 10:34-36). He even declared: "If any man come to me, and hate not his father, and mother, and wife, and children, and brethren, and sisters, yea, and his own life also, he cannot be my disciple" (Luke 14:26). These statements call for clarification. First, we must remember that consequences are often expressed in the Bible as if they were intentions. Some members of the family will respond to Christ's call; others will not—thus a conflict. Second, "hate" in the Semitic idiom does not always mean outright hostility. Third, Jesus uses hyperbole to emphasize that "no other love, no other obligation, no other relationship can be allowed to stand between the Master and His disciples. . . . Christ will have first place or no place in our hearts and lives."²⁶ Stewart states the truth succinctly: "A Christian must be ready, if God so guides him, to surrender even the call of home for the Kingdom's

²⁵*Op. cit.*, p. 138.

²⁶Childers, *op. cit.*, p. 553.

sake.”²⁷ Matt. 10:37 gives the heart of the matter. Jesus announced: “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.”

A right relationship with Christ will not destroy the intimate social units of life but rather enhance them if they are kept in their rightful secondary position. The family will become an avenue by which a disciple can fulfill his responsibility of serving others. Thus, “in so subordinating the family he [Jesus] lifted it . . . to a higher level. It becomes in his hands an agent ministering to the very highest ideal of life. The affections which it generates sweep outside its own bounds to become effective for the needs of the world.”²⁸

MATERIAL POSSESSIONS

A first-time reader of the Gospels might be amazed by the number of times that the Master speaks about material possessions. In a surprising number of parables wealth figures prominently. The rich farmer, who had a bumper crop and consequently had to build larger barns to contain it, took little thought of his soul's salvation and suddenly had to meet his Maker (Luke 12:16-21). Dives, as tradition has identified him, refused to pay any attention to the beggar Lazarus who sat at his back door. He suffered eternal punishment for his indifference to human need and lavish use of his material possessions on himself and his selected friends (Luke 6:19-31). Luke, who records a major share of the Lord's teaching on possessions, has several other parables having to do with money, such as the two debtors (Luke 7:41-43); the lost coin (Luke 15:8-10); the unjust steward (Luke 16:1-12); the 10 pieces of money (Luke

²⁷*Op. cit.*, p. 128.

²⁸Branscomb, *The Teachings of Jesus*, p. 239.

19:11-27). Matthew records the parables of the hidden treasure and the pearl of great price (Matt. 13:44-46); the unmerciful servant (Matt. 18:23-35); and the laborers in the vineyard (Matt. 20:1-16).

Added to this body of parabolic teaching are the encounters of Jesus with men of wealth. Most notable is His interview with the rich young ruler, whom Jesus instructed, "Sell that thou hast, and give to the poor, and thou shalt have treasure in heaven" (Matt. 19:16-22). Luke preserves for us the majestic story of the conversion of rich Zacchaeus, who held a franchise from the Roman government for the collection of taxes, which necessitated the hiring of several lesser revenue agents. So profound was his new birth that he dedicated half of his income to helping the poor and he set out to make complete restitution for his previous thievery (Luke 19:1-9).

The spirit of the prophets breaks through in what the Lord had to say about wealth. Those rugged preachers of social justice of the Old Testament period saw the rich oppressing and exploiting the poor and they cried out against them (see Amos 2:6-7; 4:1). They predicted the judgment of God upon them. What Jesus viewed in His own society was not much different from that which the prophets observed in their day. Jesus came from among the poor, and His sympathizing with them caused them to "hear him gladly" (Mark 12:37).

A RIVAL SALVATION

It has been suggested that Jesus saw Mammon as deceptively offering "a rival salvation." The tendency of man is to believe that "his main satisfaction and security in life are to be obtained by wealth."²⁹ The

²⁹*Ibid.*, p. 219.

god, Mammon, takes the place of the worship of the only God. In the Sermon on the Mount the Master declares unequivocally, "No man can serve two masters: for either he will hate the one, and love the other; or else he will hold to the one, and despise the other. Ye cannot serve God and mammon" (Matt. 6:24). This categorical declaration came just after His appeal to lay up treasures in heaven and just before His admonition that His followers should trust God for their daily needs. He concluded: "But seek ye first the kingdom of God, and his righteousness; and all these things shall be added unto you" (Matt. 6:33).

The effect of the worship of money is three-fold. First, it leads to the sin of covetousness. The Master refused to negotiate an inheritance struggle between two brothers, but went on to declare: "Take heed, and beware of covetousness; for a man's life consisteth not in the abundance of the things which he possesseth" (Luke 12:15). When a man feels that the whole of life lies in the security which things bring, he is likely to pursue them with his whole heart and will not hesitate to go to any measure to make sure of his possession of them. Second, it eventually deceives. What things were considered imperishable are found to be subject to the ravages of nature and evil men. "Lay not up for yourselves treasures upon earth, where moth and rust doth corrupt, and where thieves break through and steal" (Matt. 6:19). See James's reflection on these words of our Lord in 5:2-3. In His famous parable of the sower, Jesus spoke of some of the seed falling among the thorns and finally being choked out. Among the "thorns" is "the deceitfulness of riches" (Matt. 13:22).

Third, material possessions tend to build barriers to the entrance into the kingdom of God. The rich young man went away from the Lord sorrowful because Jesus told him to sell all his riches and give to

the poor. The young man's great riches stood as an insurmountable barrier to his acceptance of Christ's way. Saunders comments that the incident with the rich man is "a dramatic depiction of an alien love that had stolen God's place."³⁰ Jesus' comment on His encounter with this deceived youth staggered the disciples: "Children, how hard is it for them that trust in riches to enter into the kingdom of God! It is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle, than for a rich man to enter into the kingdom of God" (Mark 10:24-25). Absurd that a camel could get through the eye of a needle! This was the oriental way of dramatically expressing what was utterly impossible. Completely baffled, the disciples wondered who then could be saved. "With men it is impossible, but not with God: for with God all things are possible" (Mark 10:27). In effect Jesus says that it is not a matter of what a man possesses or achieves that finally saves him; it is rather what God does. Even a rich man, such as Zacchaeus, can be saved if he accepts God's terms. Sanner observes that "in the grace of God all men, rich and poor alike, may enter. The entrance fee is the same for everyone; the pearl of great price costs all that any man has (Matt. 13:45-46)."³¹

When the accumulation of money is the all-consuming passion of a man's life, there is little possibility of the message of grace reaching his heart. Often a rich man's mind is too preoccupied with many interests, all quite good in nature, to permit him to give rightful attention to his soul's salvation. Thus, as Saunders comments, "Property of every sort—the basic meaning of the Aramaic word *mammon*—constitutes a spiritual peril by dividing human loyalties, draining off man's energies, and nullifying the trust that should be vested

³⁰*Op. cit.*, p. 139.

³¹*Op. cit.*, p. 358.

in God himself.”³² Man’s salvation is found only in confidence and trust in God and in obediently doing His will. Essentially, to obey and trust God is to be “rich toward God” (Luke 12:21).

THE BENEVOLENCE OF GOD

If we must not be overly concerned to gather “the goods of this world,” but rather “the goods of the heavenly world,” who will care for us? The Master’s answer was clear. Jesus urged His listeners to trust the Heavenly Father for their daily needs. First, be not busily preoccupied with the provision of the basic needs of food and clothing (Matt. 6:25, 31). The child of the Heavenly Father will not permit a neurotic anxiety to develop over these matters. He seeks the carefree and courageous attitude which accepts his “life from day to day fresh from the hands of God.”

Second, God’s care of the natural world about Him—the fowl, the fields, and the flowers—reminds the Christian believer that the Heavenly Father most assuredly will not fail to sustain human life (Matt. 6:26-30).

Third, trustful obedience to the call and conditions of the kingdom of God will ensure the Kingdom man that God will supply all his needs, material and spiritual. “But seek ye first the kingdom of God, and his righteousness; and all these things shall be added unto you” (Matt. 6:33). Jesus said, “No man that hath left house, or brethren, or sisters, or father, or mother, or wife, or children, or lands, for my sake . . . but he shall receive an hundredfold now in this time . . . and in the world to come eternal life” (Mark 10:29-30).

THE RIGHT USE OF POSSESSIONS

Our stewardship in the Kingdom is manifested through our employment of money for the good of

³²*Op. cit.*, p. 138.

others. Possessions are a sacred trust and every man is accountable to God for the use that he makes of them.

Money offers us an opportunity to serve others. The Good Samaritan used his ingenuity to aid the needy man at the roadside, but he also left something at the hostelry to meet the material needs of the recuperating victim (Luke 10:35). On the other hand, Dives dined sumptuously but did not provide for the beggar at his door (Luke 16:19 ff.). Jesus urged His disciples to "sell that ye have, and give alms; provide yourselves bags which wax not old, a treasure in the heavens that faileth not" (Luke 12:33).

The Lord's parable of the sheep and the goats is applicable to this matter of the employment of one's material possessions for the assistance of others (Matt. 25:31-46). The sheep who are invited into the future Kingdom are those who generously dispense their material goods for those who are hungry and naked as well as care for those who are strangers, sick, and imprisoned. Matt. 10:42 can be considered a commentary on this parable. "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." In the opinion of the Master, money therefore was never to become an end in itself but must ever be a means of serving others.

A man's wealth must be used to secure the "wealth of heaven." Jesus exhorted His disciples to "lay up for yourselves treasures in heaven" (Matt. 6:20). He also urged the rich young man to "go and sell that thou hast, and give to the poor, and thou shalt have treasure in heaven" (Matt. 19:21). As Lillie observes, "Material wealth is rather something to be given away in order that a man may secure spiritual riches."³³

³³*Op. cit.*, p. 93.

In the story of the unjust steward, the Master directed His hearers to "make to yourselves friends of the mam-mom of unrighteousness; that, when ye fail, they may receive you into everlasting habitations" (Luke 16:9). Jesus was by no means approving the dishonesty of the steward. "Mammon of unrighteousness" refers to worldly wealth. "When ye fail" should be translated "when it fails." *The New English Bible* thus translates this verse: "Use your worldly wealth to win friends for yourselves, so that when money is a thing of the past you may be received into an eternal home." Worldly wealth must be used to gain eternal values. Just as the men of this world use wealth to secure their futures here, so must the sons of the Kingdom use it to make sure that they are brought into the "eternal home." In this connection Jesus' penetrating question should be heard: "What shall it profit a man, if he shall gain the whole world, and lose his own soul?" (Mark 8:36) Trench writes: "I am persuaded that we have here simply a parable of Christian prudence—Christ exhorting us to use the world and the world's goods, so to speak, *against* the world, and *for* God."³⁴ And we should add, it should be used *for* us, that is, for our eternal salvation.

In summary, what we possess materially should be pressed into service for the extension of God's goodness to others and the acquisition of eternal life for ourselves at the end of this mortal life.

QUESTIONS FOR DISCUSSION

1. What forms of political expression are available to a Christian when he finds himself at variance with the government under which he lives?

³⁴*Notes on the Parables of Our Lord* (Philadelphia: William Syckelmoore, 1878), p. 324.

2. Why is it so important to maintain family relationships? Are there psychological, educative, and spiritual reasons?

3. What is your opinion concerning Jesus' teaching on marriage and divorce? What effect did Jesus intend to create by His words on this issue? Did He wish to permit a wider range of reasons for divorce than adultery or restrict it? See Matt. 5:31-32; 19:9.

4. Discuss the question: "Is Christian love incompatible with the possession of great wealth?"

5. What are some of the personal penalties of selfishness, especially with regard to the employment of one's wealth for the good of others?

6. If Jesus were living in our time with its threat of nuclear destruction, would He be a pacifist? Can you substantiate your position by references to His teachings?

CHAPTER VI

The Consummation of the Kingdom

*Then shall the righteous shine forth as the sun
in the kingdom of their Father (Matt. 13:43).*

Jesus' teaching concerning the kingdom of God has both a "here and now" and a "there and then" character. The Kingdom is being realized in the ongoing decades of history as men are yielding their hearts to God and coming under His rulership. But there is also a future to the Kingdom. Sometime and somehow, that Kingdom will be established in perfection. Not by the straining efforts of good men, but by the glorious intervention of God, the Kingdom will come in all its majesty and power. The warfare with sin will cease and the people of God will reign with Him eternally. This note of hope was sounded clearly by our Lord during His earthly ministry. What will transpire at that momentous hour? What will be Christ's role? What will be man's fate?

THE COMING CRISIS

The Master spoke of two crises for mankind, both relating to the Kingdom. First, there is *the crisis of*

His call to discipleship whether occurring under His personal ministry or later under the proclamation of the gospel by His followers. Salvation time is always "now time!" Men must make a decision for or against Christ. Such a decision bears eternal consequences. Jesus declared: "If any man will come after me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross daily, and follow me." He then added a note as to the imperative nature of our response: "For whosoever will save his life shall lose it: and whosoever will lose his life for my sake shall find it. For what is a man profited, if he shall gain the whole world, and lose his own soul?" (Matt. 16:24-26)

Second, Jesus spoke of *the crisis of the end time* which will be created by God and which will involve the destiny of mankind as a whole. A considerable body of gospel material relates to the consummation of God's kingdom. Most notable is Jesus' discourse on the last times as found in Mark 13; Matthew 24 and 25; and Luke 21. This rather lengthy lesson on the future, appearing in all three Synoptic Gospels, has been traditionally named the "Olivet Discourse" because it was given on the Mount of Olives overlooking Jerusalem. Two themes are interwoven in it: (1) prophecies concerning the destruction of Jerusalem and (2) warnings concerning the end of the age and the complete victory of God. Cole comments that "here God's judgment on Jewry is almost insensibly dovetailed into God's judgment on all mankind at the end of time."¹ Nelson Baker offers a helpful interpretative word. Commenting on Mark 13, he observes: "The scene expands from the local world of Judea to the universal world of the nations. Yet the universal is in the local; and

¹"The Gospel According to St. Mark," *The Tyndale New Testament Commentaries* (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1961), p. 203.

the principles expressed locally in concrete events express themselves on a universal scale at the end. . . . In principle, Jerusalem's experience contained the whole."² The "intertwined references" indicate that the crises of history foreshadow the unprecedented and eternal crisis of the end time.

The Master's sermon was precipitated by one disciple's exclamation over viewing the majestic Temple area as the little company moved out of the city up to the Mount of Olives. "Master, see what manner of stones and what buildings!" In response, Jesus prophesied that "there shall not be left one stone upon another, that shall not be thrown down" (Mark 13:1-2). After the group found a comfortable place on the mount, several of the disciples asked Him when these things would take place and what signs of their fulfillment they should be looking for. In answer to these questions the Master moved into this long sermon, the full implications of which are not yet known. However, He gave the general guidelines by which Christians can discern the times. Using Mark 13 as a base, and supplementing it with other Gospel material, we note the following features:

(1) False christs will appear, that is, those who claim to be the true Messiah (13:6, 21-22).

(2) Wars, earthquakes, and famines will take place, but they will not signalize the end; they are but the beginning of the end (13:7-8). The distress of the world will mount from that time onward.

(3) Christians will be persecuted (13:9, 11, 13). Even members of the Christian's family will betray him to the authorities (13:12).

(4) The gospel will be preached to all the world before the end (13:10).

²*What Is the World Coming to?* (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1965), p. 125.

(5) In the face of abounding wickedness, some Christians shall cease to love the Lord fervently (Matt. 24: 12-13; as in the days of Noah, 24: 37-39).

(6) A world power acting blasphemously will attempt to destroy all that is sacred in the Church of Christ. This will be the "abomination of desolation" of the end time (13:14; see Dan. 9:27; 11:31; 12:11).

(7) A period of tribulation greater than any since the beginning of human history will be experienced by the Christians (13:19-20), to be followed by astronomical catastrophies (13:24-25).

(8) The true Messiah, the Son of Man, will appear suddenly in great glory and power to end the tribulation and to gather to himself all the redeemed (13: 26-27, 34-37). Matthew's language with its reference to the lightning, which can be seen by all, suggests that His appearing will be worldwide (24:27).

(9) When Israel, represented by the fig tree, is revived, the coming of the Lord is near (13:28).

(10) No man, no angel, not even the Son, knows the exact time of the end. That decision is reserved for the Father (13:32).

All the while the Lord was sketching in the events of the coming crisis, He was emphasizing, for the disciples' own good, the necessity of watchfulness. Four times He implored: "Take heed" (13:5, 9, 23, 33). The stance of the Christian today must be the same. It appears to some Christian teachers that our time is the end time.

In this connection, Matthew preserves for us three "parables of preparedness" which comprise his twenty-fifth chapter. These stories reinforce the Master's call to watchfulness. They explain the fate of the unprepared as well as the prepared. (1) The parable of the 10 virgins (25:1-13) reminds us of the conclusiveness of the end time, and one cannot expect to borrow or

buy "acceptance" with God after "the bridegroom cometh." (2) The parable of the talents (25:14-30) shows the necessity for being faithful and resourceful in the service of the Lord. (3) The parable of the sheep and the goats (25:31-46) emphasizes that preparedness involves more than mere trust and worship of God. It includes an ethical life that not only notices the needs of helpless humanity but also seeks to provide for those needs in the name of the Lord Jesus. Christians therefore must live with the end time in view. The whole of their lives must be governed by their "looking for" and loving Christ's appearing, as Paul declares (Titus 2:13; II Tim. 4:8).

THE RETURN OF THE SON OF MAN

The element of futurity in Jesus' teaching involves both himself and the kingdom of God. What happens at the crisis in the future is the consummation of the Kingdom or the rule of God over the whole world. Christ's second advent will correspond with the establishment eternally of the Kingdom. The interrelatedness of these two occurrences was expressed by Jesus several times. For example, in the extensive parable of the sower in Matthew 13, in which the failure of men to receive the seed is pictured as having eternal consequences, Christ declared: "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" (13:41-43).

At the judgment, which transpires at the coming of the Son of Man in His glory, those who sit "on the right hand," because they have lived with sensitivity to the needs of men, shall hear the King say, "Come,

ye blessed of my Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world" (Matt. 25: 31-46). Around the table in the Upper Room before His betrayal and trial, the Master identified His coming again with the consummation of the Kingdom. Luke records: "I appoint unto you a kingdom, as my Father hath appointed unto me; that ye may eat and drink at my table in my kingdom, and sit on thrones judging the twelve tribes of Israel" (22:29-30). Likewise both Matthew and Mark report Jesus as saying: "I will not drink henceforth of this fruit of the vine, until that day when I drink it new with you in my Father's kingdom" (Matt. 26: 29; Mark 14: 25).

Looking into the future the Christian not only expects the consummation of the work which God has begun in his heart and initiated in the history of mankind as a whole, but he rejoices that he will see his Lord. The watchword of the Early Church was "Mar-anatha!" (Our Lord Cometh!) Those first followers had much of importance to declare after the ascension of Christ. They testified to their Master's birth, ministry, death, resurrection, and ascension. But with all that they joyfully proclaimed, "He's coming again!" The reason for their faith in Jesus' return lay in what He had said concerning it.

According to the four Gospels, Jesus spoke explicitly 17 times of His coming. The Lord specifically declared His return in the apocalyptic passages and in several parables. In the parable of the importunate widow, Jesus encourages men to pray and hope for His coming, at which time He will avenge His elect and overthrow all iniquity. "And shall not God avenge his own elect, which cry day and night unto him, though he bear long with them? I tell you that he will avenge them speedily. Nevertheless when the Son of man cometh, shall he find faith on the earth?" (Luke 18:7-8) One of the rewards of the faithful will be that of being

ministered unto by Christ. "Verily I say unto you, that he shall gird himself, and make them to sit down to meat, and will come forth and serve them" (Luke 12:37).

Near the end of His earthly ministry, in His intimate talks with His disciples Jesus underscored the fact of His return. Two passages are of particular note. (1) At the institution of the Last Supper, according to Paul's record, which is the oldest, Jesus said: "For as often as ye eat this bread, and drink this cup, ye do shew the Lord's death till he come" (I Cor. 11:26). On the minds of His disciples He left the firm impression that they were to perform this ritual until the time of His second advent. (2) In John's majestic record of Jesus' last discourses with His disciples (John 14-16), we have the Lord promising reunion with them. "And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again" (14:3). He repeated the promise: "Ye have heard how I said unto you, I go away, and come again unto you" (14:28). Following His resurrection, Jesus mentioned His return again when He interviewed Peter by the Sea of Galilee. The Big Fisherman inquired about the future of the Apostle John and in response the Master said to him: "If I will that he tarry till I come, what is that to thee? follow thou me" (John 21:20-22).

Jesus' instruction did not make the impact upon His listeners that it should have made. It is one thing to be taught; it is another thing to understand and to act upon the truth received. On that memorable day of the Lord's ascension, the disciples, no doubt with faces revealing amazement and sorrow, watched their Master leave this earthly order from the Mount of Olives. Two messengers of heaven stood by them and questioned: "Ye men of Galilee, why stand ye gazing up into heaven? this same Jesus, which is taken up from you into heaven, shall so come in like manner as ye have seen him go into heaven" (Acts 1:10-11).

Basically the Lord's teachings about His coming are plain and unmistakable. His coming will be sudden, like the lightning out of the sky, or a thief in the night. It will be unexpected, at an hour that will take the world completely by surprise. It will be visible to all and attended by supernatural events. The exact time of His appearing, however, is known only to God the Father. Last but not least, His coming will introduce a judgment at which the principal criterion will be the attitude taken by men to Jesus.

The faith of the Church throughout the ages since Jesus' life on earth has been nurtured by the truth that the Lord will someday return. And concurrent with His second advent will be the completion of all God's labors in redeeming His creatures. The last note of the life of our Lord therefore is a joyful, winning one. The eminent theologian Emil Brunner put it succinctly when he wrote: "Faith in Christ without the expectation of His Parousia is a cheque that is never cashed, a promise that is not made in earnest. . . . It is like a flight of stairs that leads nowhere, but ends in the void."³ James Stewart has commented that it was this eternal hope of the return of our Lord and the establishment of the kingdom of God that "generated the great vision of the seer with whose book the New Testament closes (Rev. 11:15), the vision of a day when heaven itself would ring with a mighty tumult of voices, and their adoring, rejoicing cry would be: 'The kingdoms of this world are become the kingdoms of our Lord, and of his Christ; and he shall reign for ever and ever.'"⁴

THE JUDGMENT

Judgment necessarily must be part of the future. In the teachings of Jesus the kingdom of God is set

³*The Christian Doctrine of the Church, Faith, and the Consummation* (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1962), p. 396.

⁴*Op. cit.*, p. 54.

over against the kingdom of Satan and evil. Jesus' contemporaries thought He was a representative of Beelzebub, the prince of the devils, when He cast out a demon from a man. After He demonstrated to them their fallacious logic in suggesting that a cohort of the demonic kingdom would cast demons out of men, He declared: "But if I cast out devils by the Spirit of God, then the kingdom of God is come upon you" (Matt. 12:22-30). The Lord's return and the accompanying judgment "mark the close of the present era, the destruction of everything that is hostile to the Kingdom of God, the final victory of the Kingdom of God over all the forces of evil."⁵

The great battle at the end of time, about which New Testament writers speak, is followed by a great trial. Though political and social matters pertain to the end-time events, moral factors are basic. The conflict between God and Satan is a moral one. Therefore the great trial of men must take place. As Baker comments, the judgment will be an event "in which all the ingredients in the moral mixtures of mankind are separated finally into pure good and evil."⁶ God's sovereignty will be fully exercised and demonstrated at the judgment. Before all creation God's righteous nature and purpose will be vindicated.

Judgment Is Proceeding Now. In the fourth Gospel much is said concerning judgment as it relates to man's present life. Jesus said to Nicodemus: "He that believeth on him is not condemned: but he that believeth not is condemned already, because he hath not believed in the name of the only begotten Son of God. And this is the condemnation, that light is come into the world, and men loved darkness rather than light, because their deeds were evil" (John 3:18-19). Christ made it clear

⁵T. W. Manson, *The Teaching of Jesus*, p. 274.

⁶*Op. cit.*, p. 76.

that He was sent into the world to save it and not to condemn it. However, paradoxically men are forced to make a decision for or against Him. To deny Christ is to bring oneself under judgment. What will transpire at the final judgment by way of final condemnation of men has its beginnings in the decisions of this life. However, John's Gospel, even with its highlighting of "present judgment" in human lives, does not overlook nor reduce Jesus' teaching on the final judgment. John 5:28-29 reads: "For the hour is coming, in the which all that are in the graves shall hear his voice, and shall come forth; they that have done good, unto the resurrection of life; and they that have done evil, unto the resurrection of damnation" (see also John 12:48). John concurs in this regard with the Synoptic Gospels, which record Jesus as declaring specifically a final judgment. "But I say unto you, That every idle word that men shall speak, they shall give account thereof in the day of judgment" (Matt. 12:36; cf. 10:15; 11:22, 24).

The Judgment Is Universal in Scope. All nations and all men will be brought to the final judgment according to our Lord's words. All mankind will be on trial. In the parable of the sheep and goats, Jesus pictures the Son of Man sitting upon the throne of His glory and "all nations" gathered before Him (Matt. 25:31). All of Israel will be there because the 12 apostles will sit upon 12 thrones and judge the 12 tribes of Israel (Matt. 19:28; Luke 22:30). All the Gentiles will be present for that great judgment. This is implied in the statement that "the queen of the south" and "the men of Nineveh" shall rise in the day of judgment and condemn their generations of Jews for failure to fulfill their God-given responsibilities of evangelizing the nations. Jesus rebuked the cities of Galilee, where He had performed many miracles, for their lack of genuine response. He compared their fate to that of the Gentile cities of Tyre and Sidon at the day of judgment, sug-

gesting thereby that the Gentiles will be there too (Matt. 11:20-24). The fact that the other writers of the New Testament promulgate a doctrine of universal judgment strongly supports the truth that Jesus preached it (see Acts 10:42; Rom. 2:5-6; 14:10; I Cor. 3:13; II Cor. 5:10; II Tim. 4:1; Heb. 9:27; I Pet. 4:5; Rev. 20:11-15). We can understand, therefore, as C. Ryder Smith has pointed out, why 18 parables of our Lord express the idea of judgment.⁷ The manifestation of God's rule in Christ was and is the world's greatest opportunity to be saved. To reject this offer must have eternal consequences.

Christ Is the Criterion of Judgment. The principal criterion of judgment in that day will be the attitude of men to Jesus. The Master had some things to say to His disciples concerning the coming trial. He taught them to expect a future judgment, and He told them in unmixed language that if they denied Him before men in this life He would deny them in the presence of the Father at that day (Matt. 10:33; Luke 12:8-9). Failure to exercise mercy and to forgive as they had been taught would bring the condemnation of the Heavenly Father. So Jesus stated following His account of the unforgiving servant: "So likewise shall my heavenly Father do also unto you, if ye from your hearts forgive not every one his brother their trespasses" (Matt. 18:35). Jesus' disciples therefore will be judged finally by their loyalty to Him and by the relationship of their behavior to the teachings of the Master.

Nonbelievers of that first century who heard the word of the Lord and who saw the Kingdom life lived out in perfection by Christ will be judged by Him likewise. No tolerance will be forthcoming for the cities

⁷*The Bible Doctrine of the Hereafter* (London: The Epworth Press, 1958), p. 194.

of Galilee with whom He shared so much truth and miraculous power (Matt. 11:20-24). The heathen peoples of Sodom, Gomorrah, Tyre, Sidon, Nineveh, and Sheba will fare better in the final judgment than unrepentant, haughty Israel. More tragic will be the fate of the religious leaders who not only obstinately opposed Him but misled the peasants of Palestine on spiritual matters by their superficial dedication to the Law of God and their blatant hypocritical living (see Matthew 23).

But what about the nonbelievers of other nations and generations? T. W. Manson reminds us that the criterion remains the same: each individual is judged by his treatment of Jesus.⁸ In the vision of the judgment is Matt. 25:31-46, where "all nations" are gathered, the principle is enunciated: "Inasmuch as ye have done it unto one of the least of these my brethren, ye have done it unto me." Saunders interprets it as follows: "Those anywhere and everywhere who have shown merciful love toward the Son of Man, who has met them in every sufferer and needy person, hear the welcome invitation. But a denial of compassion and acts of mercy toward the 'least of the brethren' by anyone, including his own followers, is a denial that results in banishment from the heavenly fellowship."⁹ Of particular note in this comment is the clause "who has met them in every sufferer and needy person." Christ is abroad in the world and makes His presence felt in every situation of need to which men can choose to respond in mercy or turn away from. It gives us pause to contemplate that "the scales are heavily loaded on the side of mercy." Moreover, as Manson points out, the gift of a cup of cold water is just about the absolute minimum, but even it counts in the judgment if it is given from proper motives.

⁸*The Teaching of Jesus*, p. 270.

⁹*Op. cit.*, p. 202.

THE FATE OF THE LOST

What lies beyond the judgment? What are the possibilities for mankind after the separation of the saved and the lost at the judgment? Throughout the Gospels a variety of terms appear, used by the Lord, which speak of the destiny of the lost. The principal one is the word "hell," which translates two words in the original language, namely, *hades* and *gehenna*.

Hades occurs three times in the Gospels (Matt. 11:23; 16:18; Luke 16:23). In the first one the Lord says that the unrepentant city of Capernaum will be brought down to *hades*, which would suggest the place of the wicked. In the second reference, He says the "gates of *hades*" shall not prevail against His Church. Obviously Christ is using *hades* to refer to Satan's headquarters, which is the great enemy of the Church. The third passage speaks of the rich man who is in torment in *hades* because he showed no mercy for the beggar, Lazarus. *Hades* was generally employed to translate the Hebrew *sheol*, the place of departed spirits, and therefore carried that basic meaning. However, by Jesus' time it seems to have been used to suggest a place of wicked men and of torment.

Gehenna, also translated "hell," is the principal term employed to describe the place reserved for the unrepentant after the judgment. The derivation of the word is the name of the Valley of Hinnom to the south of Jerusalem, into which the city's garbage was thrown. A perpetual fire burned there. Understandably the place became associated with the idea of destruction, both by worms and by fire. In Old Testament days, unclean corpses were thrown there for cremation (II Kings 23:10). The bodies of those who were slain in the destruction of Jerusalem in 586 B.C. were cast into Hinnom (Jer. 7:32). By New Testament times, *gehenna* came to mean "the place of eternal punishment."

We are startled when we realize that of the 12 times the word *gehenna* appears in the New Testament, our Lord uses it 11 of those times (the exception is Jas. 3:6). There are two clear groups of these sayings which use *gehenna*: (1) Warnings addressed to disciples about hindrances and stumbling blocks to faith, and about the conditions controlling personal destiny—Matt. 5:22, 29, 30; 10:28; 18:9; Mark 9:43, 45, 47; Luke 12:5); (2) condemnation of the scribes and Pharisees (Matt. 23:15, 33).¹⁰

In the words addressed to His followers, Jesus gave stern words about removing any stumbling blocks to continued relationship with Him and thus avoiding destruction which hell will bring. For example, it is better to have an eye plucked out or a hand or foot cut off because it causes one to sin than to have all of one's members and be thrown into hell (Matt. 5:29-30; Mark 9:43-48). Jesus also admonished His followers not to call his brother a "fool," for he who does is liable to a hell of fire (Matt. 5:22). Moreover, He exhorted that in the time of persecution they should not so much fear those who can kill the body as God, who can destroy both soul and body in hell (Matt. 10:28; Luke 12:4-5).

Jesus' indictment of the scribes and Pharisees leaves us breathless and somewhat puzzled. "Ye serpents, ye generation of vipers, how can ye escape the damnation of hell?" (Matt. 23:33) But the failings of these men must not be overlooked; they are listed in Matthew 23. Jesus was justifiably angered over the fact that the masses needed the guidance which these leaders could have given them, but these religionists were living for their own interests and positions and without serious regard for the profound needs of others.

¹⁰William Strawson, *Jesus and the Future Life* (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1959), p. 144.

Instead of bringing their fellowmen to God, by their deception they were driving them farther away from Him. The punishment which these men will suffer is symbolized in the word *gehenna* with all its foreboding ideas deriving from the unquenchable fire and stench of the dump outside Jerusalem.

In the teaching of Jesus on this subject there are several phrases just as awesome as the word *gehenna*. In fact, they are synonyms for it. Among them are "the furnace of fire" (Matt. 13:42, 50); "everlasting fire" (Matt. 18:8; 25:41); and "the fire that never shall be quenched" (Mark 9:43-48).

Another group of expressions give some indication as to the nature of hell, "eternal punishment" (Matt. 25:46); "outer darkness" (Matt. 8:12; 22:13; 25:30); a place "prepared for the devil and his angels" (Matt. 25:41); "being in torments" (Luke 16:23); and "wailing and gnashing of teeth" (Matt. 13:42).

What conclusions can be drawn from this survey of the words and phrases employed by the Lord with regard to the fate of the unrepentant sinner?

(1) Jesus' teachings concerning the relationship of God with His creatures included some discussion of the destiny of mankind.

(2) By His use of the word *hades*, the Master conveyed the idea that it is a place ruled by wicked beings and those condemned to it suffer torment.

(3) In His use of the word *gehenna*, Jesus was speaking in terms much akin to the modern notion of hell. *Gehenna* is a place and state of fiery eternal punishment. Since descriptive terminology of the nature of hell is extremely limited in Jesus' teaching, it behooves Christians to exercise restraint in trying to speak of hell. Most important is the unequivocal declaration of the fact of eternal punishment.

(4) The final state of the unredeemed will not be the result of any prior fiat or decision of God; it is the result of man's personal, earthly, sinful behavior. Indifference to God's demands or persistent resistance to His call render a man liable to eternal punishment.

(5) The afterlife of the unrepentant will be characterized by unrelieved sorrow and social disorientation as suggested by the phrase "wailing and gnashing of teeth." The "wailing" will be due to a gnawing memory, symbolized in "the worm that dieth not." The "gnashing of teeth" implies a rage which permits no social unity, such as will prevail in the home of the redeemed.

(6) The penalty for the impenitent will be eternal. In such a state as hell, the impenitent will have no possibility of fulfilling the purpose of God and thus being saved. The term "outer darkness" implies a total absence of spiritual light. There is no viable suggestion in the teaching of Jesus of either annihilation or a "second chance" for redemption. The fate of the lost will be eternal separation from the presence of God. Between the unrepentant and redeemed there is "a great gulf fixed."

(7) The most direct and severest words on eternal punishment by our Lord were uttered in His preachments to those who should know better the gravity of a man's relationship to God and his fellowman. Included in this group were the cities of Galilee, Jerusalem, the Pharisees, Sadducees, scribes, and His own close followers.

In conclusion, Baker's words to those who would seek to empty this language of serious meaning are compelling. "Cutting away all possible symbolism, the message of awful doom for those who remain hostile to God is clear. Their condition is separation from God and all that is holy. It is separation from the good;

it is loneliness and lovelessness. It is punishment; it is pain, attended by continuous restlessness; and it ends in eternal destruction."¹¹ He goes on to urge the people of God to do "their utmost to save all men from an end so catastrophic." We must not forget that through us Christ still extends His arms of care to all men, pleading, "Come unto me . . . and I will give you rest."

THE REWARDS OF THE KINGDOM LIFE

It is inspiring to turn to this subject after having listened to the words of our Saviour on the fate of the unsaved. The expectation of the redeemed is indeed a "blessed hope." In speaking of the afterlife of the faithful, we tend to turn to other portions of the New Testament, but we must not overlook what Christ had to say on the subject. As previously noted, at the coming of the Son of Man "the righteous" and "the blessed of the Father" shall inherit the kingdom of the Father (Matt. 13:43; 25:34). Furthermore, "the righteous" shall "go away . . . into life eternal" (Matt. 25:46). This latter thought is in keeping with the promises of Jesus as recorded in John's Gospel, where Jesus says that whosoever believes in the Son does not perish but has everlasting life (John 3:16; 10:28).

"Eternal life" refers both to the life of God now experienced by the believer and the life in "the blessed period of final consummation." It is a synonym for "the kingdom of God." The Master was giving expression to hopes which were deeply imbedded in Jewish literature. For example, Dan. 7:18, 22 describes how the saints of the Most High shall receive the Kingdom and possess it for ever and ever. The Wisdom

¹¹*Op. cit.*, p. 105.

of Solomon, a noncanonical writing, describes the righteous as receiving "a glorious Kingdom" (5:16).

What is the nature of this consummate Kingdom-life? Jesus gave several hints of it.

The Gift of God. Luke 12:32 reads: "Fear not, little flock: for it is your Father's good pleasure to give you the kingdom." Since Jesus is speaking to His followers in this case, the reference to the gift of the Kingdom must be taken to be futuristic. God gives men the privilege now to come under His rule, but He also promises the gift of His rule in the future, in that age of complete divine victory. In Luke 22:28-30, we have a comparable thought. "And I appoint unto you a kingdom, as my Father hath appointed unto me." This verse along with its context indicates that the redeemed shall receive an exalted position in God's future. Similarly, to "inherit the kingdom prepared . . . from the foundation of the world" (Matt. 25:34) or "eternal life" (Mark 10:17), means not only that one acquires something to which he holds title but also that one receives something which another has given to him. The state of bliss of the blessed comes from the hand of God and is supernaturally created for His people. It is not the creation of the goodness of men on this earthly sphere.

The Perfect Fellowship. It is not without significance that Jesus related His last meal with His disciples to the future Kingdom. He said: "I will not drink henceforth of this fruit of the vine, until that day when I drink it new with you in my Father's kingdom" (Matt. 26:29; Mark 14:25). Those humble followers will share in an eternal and perfect fellowship in the coming Kingdom. That heavenly community will be a unit. Strawson writes: "It is not a purely individual survival, depending on any inherent quality of immortality in human beings, that is the ground of

the hope implied in this saying. It is as a community that they have hope for the future, and as belonging to Christ in a redeemed relationship, not in their own strength or worth."¹²

Heaven will be the place of infinite harmony, where all the elect from the four corners of earth whom the Son of Man will draw together will live in consummate peace with the Prince of Peace (Luke 13:29). That future Kingdom will be a city, a social order, whose citizens will enjoy the presence of their Lord eternally and have rich fellowship with each other in the spiritual bonds of holy love. What a time that will be when we see Jesus! What a time that will be when we join in fellowship with the saints of all ages—Isaiah, Paul, Peter, John, Luther, Wesley, and those from our own generation who have preceded us to that distant shore!

Regnant Joy. Because there will be genuine fellowship in that future life, joy will prevail. No more pleasant time exists than when friends share a meal together. Jesus declares that He will invite His followers to "eat and drink at my table in my kingdom" (Luke 22:30). The future Kingdom will be like a wedding with all its excitement and genuine happiness (Matt. 25:1-13). The joy of that blissful moment will be like the deep satisfaction a person experiences whenever he successfully fulfills a life task. In the parable of the talents, the Lord says: "Well done, thou good and faithful servant: thou hast been faithful over a few things, I will make thee ruler over many things: enter thou into the joy of thy Lord" (Matt. 25:21).

The Redeemed Person. Jesus taught that all men would be resurrected, "they that have done good, unto the resurrection of life; and they that have done evil,

¹²*Op. cit.*, p. 168.

unto the resurrection of damnation" (John 5:29). Just before He raised Lazarus, He told Martha: "I am the resurrection, and the life: he that believeth in me, though he were dead, yet shall he live" (John 11:25). When the scoffing Sadducees, who repudiated the doctrine of the resurrection, came to Jesus asking about a woman who had married and survived seven husbands and wanting to know whose wife she was going to be in the resurrection, the Master made it quite clear that the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob is not the God of the dead, but of the living (Mark 12:18-27). The Lord implied in His rebuttal that resurrection is a natural corollary to the doctrine of a living God.

In the resurrection, however, the body is raised, even though as Paul indicates in I Cor. 15:50 it does not possess the same material element. At least it will have a continuity in form with the present body. Jesus warned His hearers that it would be better to lose an eye or a hand than to have the whole body cast into hell (Matt. 5:29-30). Also, He told them that they should fear the One who can destroy both soul and body in hell (Matt. 10:28). It is reasonable to assume that the whole person, body and soul, will be resurrected to enter the future Kingdom. Kenneth Grider insists that "there is nothing in the Bible (nor in the main creeds of the Church) about disembodied spirits in the next world existing *in vacuo*." Nevertheless, the normal functions of the physical will not be indulged. Jesus told the Sadducees that "they which shall be accounted worthy to obtain that world, and the resurrection from the dead, neither marry, nor are given in marriage" (Luke 20:35). He goes on to say that they "neither . . . die any more: for they are equal unto the angels; and are the children of God, being the children of the resurrection" (20:36).

There in God's new order man will live in his glorified yet identifiable resurrected person. There he

will bask in the splendor of God's majesty even as the angels do now (Matt. 18:10).

The Dynamic Life. We must dismiss at once any notion of monotony or unchallenging, static sameness in the future Kingdom. "That would be the death of joy," writes Baker.¹³ Heaven will offer to men infinite opportunities of service and growth. Jesus will share with His disciples the privileges and responsibilities of the Kingdom. One such responsibility will be the judgment of the world. Jesus taught that the apostles would "sit on thrones judging the twelve tribes of Israel" (Luke 22:30). There will be governmental ministries, too. In the parable of the nobleman, the good servant, who had been "faithful in a very little" on earth, would in heaven be given "authority over ten cities" (Luke 19:17). In the parable of the talents in Matthew, the servant who was faithful here on earth will be made a "ruler over many things" (Matt. 25:21). Kenneth Grider has commented, "There will be activities in heaven to engage man's highest faculties."

With such opportunities growth will be as natural there as it is for man here. The Kingdom-life, only partially realized here, will have infinite possibilities of expansion in that new order. H. B. Swete has summarized it well:

There may be progress in knowledge, progress in enjoyment, progress in service—a progress which at every point will open up new wonders, new opportunities, new outlooks into greater future, and as that future unfolds itself, new and unsuspected scopes for the energies of redeemed men, new ways of fellowship with God in Christ, new companionships with the good and great of past generations, and with angelic beings who have watched and guarded us in life, and rejoiced over our repentance, and are ready to welcome us into the eternal

¹³*Op. cit.*, p. 117.

mansions, and will share our worship and our work, our service and our joy, in the ages to come.¹⁴

The word of our Lord is always our hope. Speaking of the believer's future, He declared: "There are many rooms in my Father's House. If there were not, should I have told you that I am going away to prepare a place for you? It is true that I am going away to prepare a place for you, but it is just as true that I am coming again to welcome you into my own home, so that you may be where I am" (John 14:2-3, Phillips).

QUESTIONS FOR DISCUSSION

1. Why would Jesus not possess knowledge as to the day and the hour of the coming of the Son of Man? Did the incarnate Christ have limitations?

2. What events in current history might suggest that the end time is near? Correlate your answer with the teachings of Jesus.

3. What characterizes the life of the Church whenever she takes seriously the Lord's teachings on the Second Advent?

4. Granting the New Testament's clear word on eternal punishment, what supports from reason are there for it?

5. How can the individual Christian keep himself prepared for the Lord's coming?

6. What, in your opinion, will be the character of the life in heaven?

¹⁴*The Life of the World to Come* (New York: The Macmillan Co., 1918), p. 107.

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