

1921

The kingdom of God in the New Testament sense

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GRADUATING THESIS

THE KINGDOM OF GOD IN THE NEW TESTAMENT SENSE.

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April 13, 1921.

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THE KINGDOM OF GOD IN THE NEW TESTAMENT SENSE.

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THE KINGDOM OF GOD IN THE NEW TESTAMENT SENSE.

The characteristic emphasis of Jesus' teaching was the kingdom of God. To this rule among men, its nature and requirements, its blessings and obligations, his life and teachings are inseparably attached. Whether it be in sermon, model prayer, or explanation by parable, the dispensation of God's blessed will in men's receptive wills was foremost. This revelation was the reason for his mission, its theme the most consistent index to his life.

To the awakened interest and study of Christ from the historical point of view, we owe a quickened and clearer conception of that order he came to establish in the world. We are advantaged in our study of this order by viewing it through twenty centuries of Christian history. Though it is possible for us to more thoroughly acquaint ourselves with the import of the kingdom there is not always to be found a unanimity as to its character. There is ever then, that value which comes from a renewed study and reiteration of what this kingdom is, because so many tangents as well as one-sided spectacles are possible.

There is that sense in which the kingdom of God is

criterion. It was a term not uncommon to Christ's contemporaries. It stood for something. Around it, his meditation often centered, from it his discourses radiated, and in it his essential kingship was offered ready channel for manifestation. By the frequency of its iteration and its general or specific implication in Jesus' whole teaching we may safely risk the kingdom of God as a normative in the spiritual society of men.

11.
Tendencies in the interpretation of the kingdom.

In the interpretation of the kingdom of God there are many tendencies; some with wide divergence, some with less. Of the many, two stand out as worthy of notice. The drift toward making the social idea central on one hand, while on the other is the tendency toward holding the purely religious as all embracing.

1. Those who determine the kingdom socially may range from very normal and scriptural Christians to those who are too often content to become satisfied with mere enthusiasm and effort for society. Range must be given here, for no hard and fast lines can be marked owing to the individuality found in interpretation and experience. However there is in the field of kingdom exposition a number, not at all negligible, who are at one in making salvation by act prominent in thus conceiving Christ's ideal as scarcely more than social interaction.

Holders of this theory lay so tremendous influence

on presents that the future is often largely obscured. This is probably a reaction from a passive contemplation of the future, a species of other worldliness utterly foreign to Jesus and repulsive to all verile souls. Yet the social order is what we have with us, reason these followers of the act, and the opportunity to minister to those in prison, to clothe the naked and visit the sick is the task at hand. Furthermore there is no lack of incentive in that this helpfulness is interpreted as service to Christ--"in as much as ye have done it unto one of the least of these, my bretheren, ye have done it unto me." Thus in the whirl of the developing order, "that now is", there is a tendency to hastily pass over and give little concern to "the life that is to come."

There is sometimes found in the social interpretation a kind of lurking tendency not to stop very far this side a humanitarianism that would make mankind an end in itself. With a system of worthy acts, that which has respect to God and spirit and the other world, is too often looked upon as indefinite, while a kingdom is thought of which has social interaction as its highest good and a God is thought of who has been disigned in the brotherhood of man.

2. There is the other conception of the kingdom-the religious-which has no lack of supporters. Here too there

can be no rigid division between social and religious for there is a shading from those who approach a social gospel to those who are enthusiastically zealous to affirm inward experience almost if not intirely to the exclusion of practical activity in the group relations. In this attempt to conceive the kingdom ideal there is too often manifest a bias that amounts to a disparagment of the obligations one owes the group while over-emphasising a pietistic inwardness.

The hereafter is sure to bulk over large in the purely religious idea of the kingdom of heaven, and the present is in line to be obscured, while the crying need is likely to be answered merely for conscience sake. The contemplation of future blessedness too easily becomes a refuge from unpleasant surroundings, and a desire to partake of the heaven to come is more inviting than to undertake the kingdom of heaven's incoming here and now.

The kingdom that Jesus preached and labored for and the New Testament portrays is neither one in which the social conception is dominant, nor one in which the purely religious conception is central. It is neither but it is both. It is not an order with two poles between which the kingdom citizen finds himself but it is one whole--a unity. There is ⁱⁿ this ideal order of God a rich bestowal of a blessing to man and a

111. The kingdom of God as synthesis.

corresponding recognition on the part of man that the blessing is a moral trust which if not carried out reduces the kingdom to phantom.

1. The true oneness of the commonwealth of God is found in the New Testament revelation of God as a Father. Jesus portrayed the Heavenly Father as vitally interested in mankind. By his all feeling and all felt power the world is maintained, the harvests of men are made possible both to the good and the bad, and by his love, receptive hearts are filled by the Holy Spirit. The Father as revealed in the New Testament is one who seeks out the motives in deeds, the secrets of men's hearts, hears prayers and knows the wants of his children ere they are uttered. Jesus in his discourses proclaimed the Father and himself as intimately related and associated in life, judgment, and work. Men are to God as a lost sheep is to a good shepherd, or a lost piece of silver to a fugal woman. Vividly the sonship of man is illustrated in the prodigal and his reception, after coming to himself, by a loving father. This relationship between God and himself as a Fatherhood and a Sonship is to be the key to the relation men are to hold in the kingdom.

As God is good to men and as he is the unselfish loving source of their good, so men are to be forgiving

in terms like these, " In as much as ye have done it unto one of the least of these, my brethren, ye have done it unto me. "

IV. The
kingdom's
citizen-
ship.

1. If we have found the kingdom in finding the Fatherhood and Sonship the citizenship will be very closely related and a very real relation. It will be manifest in the citizen's sentiment. A sentiment has been defined as "an organized system of emotional tendencies centered about some object." We are told that wherever the treasure is there also is the heart. We may with equal truth say that wherever the ideal is there the sentiment is also. The kingdom has been set up as the ideal. About this kingdom then we shall expect to find the emotional tendencies of the true citizen centering. Jesus directed the emotions of men both in the direction of love to God and love to man when he reiterated the best of the law and the prophets, " Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart and with all thy soul and with all thy mind----- and thou shalt love thy neighbor as thyself." If such a sentiment is to control the citizen the transforming power of his life is to be second only to that of Jesus himself whose life has been described in the Gospels as communion with his Father and benign enthusiasm for men. He went off alone to pray and yet he never forgot to love the halt and blind and publicans and sinners. Here in

the life of Christ is worked out, for the citizen, the characteristic sentiment of the kingdom--God and man.

"Honor all men, love the brethren, Fear God."

2. We know that it is the Father's good pleasure to give us the kingdom. But the question arises, who may enter into this benign rule among men? We must answer that all may enter who so choose by responding to the divine will. To answer otherwise is to acclaim the kingdom a fraud. To say that it is for a select number irrespective of personal choice is to deny the very essence of the Fatherhood as revealed in Jesus. The ministry of Jesus testifies to the eligibility of all men to seek the kingdom of heaven and its righteousness. Was he not the friend of outcasts, of publicans and sinners? To those who were burdened and heavy laden did he not say, "Come unto me"? Indeed when little children were about to be driven from his presence he included them in his rule by saying, "Forbid them not for such is the kingdom of heaven". When the Greeks through Philip inquired to gain an audience with Jesus his spiritual vision pierced the narrow boundries of an Israelitic salvation, for the kingdom which he preached as attainable only by faith was not merely for a Palestinian district or rigid sticklers for a worn out law, but for the "world" and "whosoever".

~~When a gentile showed such implicit faith in his authority~~

Jesus declared the spiritually favored had been eclipsed and should be cast off because of their unbelief, while in the consummated kingdom there should assemble from the east and west those who would sit down with Isaac and Jacob. His last words were leagued with the stupendous task, "Go ye into all the world, and preach the gospel unto the whole creation." Certainly Paul could not but follow in the train of his Master and declare that he was debtor both to the Greek and the barbarian. His answer to the Macedonian need was but the outward effect of a re-affirmed conviction in his own mind that salvation was not for certain districts but for all men in all places. Then the kingdom is not bounded by ethnic walls but has an open door to the whole world and above that door is written in letters so bold that he who runs may read the fact that God's kingdom is an universal kingdom.

3. How shall the kingdom be entered? We are warned that this entrance is not to be gained by mere observance. "I say unto you if your righteousness exceed not the righteousness of the Scribes and Pharisees ye shall not enter into the kingdom of heaven." We are told also that a weak effort is to fail admittance. "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." ~~Then to become a citizen of the kingdom~~

is to escape observance by believing, and to steer clear of apathy by energetically seeking to conform to the will of God. Repentance and faith in the gospel, were the requisites toward the realization of the kingdom which Jesus declared at hand. The "belief" he speaks of is the absolutely necessary childlike and trustful reception of the kingdom-gift. The "repentance" spoken of is as Professor Bruce interprets, a conforming of the life to the law in order that one may hope to obtain the honors of membership in the holy commonwealth. So the entrance is to be obtained by faith, and a violent seizing of the kingdom by force as in the days of John the Herald.

In the discourse of Jesus to Nicodemus the same conditions of entrance are laid down as in the Synoptics though approached differently. Here the entrance to the kingdom is not to be attained except the individual shall experience a re-birth. This entrance-condition was further explained as a birth by the Spirit as opposed to any biological generation. That which is born of the flesh is flesh. He only who is born of the Spirit is capable of seeing the kingdom of heaven. That this requirement was in the reach of the experience of men Jesus affirmed and then showed that belief in him as the sent of God, and a doing of the truth, would entitle one to enter into the highest good, to come to the light--to see the realm

of God.

4. When once the conditions of entering the kingdom have been met the very practical matter of conduct in the new citizenship is engaging. We would expect those who knock for admittance and gain an entrance to walk worthy of the privilege where unto they are called. As entrance is effected by faith, the just must still live by faith. As the realm is entered by a seeking to comply with the will of God the conduct must ever be an engaging to effectuate the Father's will. If the commonwealth of God is seen to be a reality, not by creaturely generation, but by a rebirth effected by the Spirit, so still the conduct, to comport with the newness of life, must find its spring of action in the Spirit. Thus when once the cardinal principle of right motive has been enthroned in the life, the expression or manifestation is natural and full worth while. Then the citizen's will comes into its own by endeavoring to do the divine will and the light of the world is actualized in history. Such citizenship cannot be hid for it is set upon a hill. Meekness, mercy, purity of heart, and the peace making virtue, are practiced in society and become its salt. Even the customary antipathy toward foes is transcended by a positive law of love which prays for, rather than hates. By this attitude the citizenship of the kingdom

of heaven is revealed and the citizens are known as the children of the Father who is in Heaven. " By this shall all know that ye are my disciples if ye have love one to another. "

5. As to the citizen's liberty. If in the divine kingdom one expects to find servitude he is to be happily disappointed. What one does find are sons. A fraternity having one common Father; a Father having many sons; the sons experiencing a wondrous liberty. If sons of earthly kings are relieved from the payment of taxes then the sons of the Heavenly Father are to enjoy a freedom from servile obligations. In ceremony and outward performance there is the servitude that killeth regard for the noblest and best; in the kingdom of Christ there is the spontaneity of service which kindles more and more a flame of loyal devotion toward the Father-God. The children are free. They have freely accepted a yoke, a yoke of service made easy by the brotherly cooperation of Him who said, " come unto me all ye that labor and are heavy laden. "

Those who continue in the word as set forth by the Son, who becoming his disciples, apprehend the truth and thereby are made free, find of a reality that the kingdom of God is righteousness and joy in the Holy Ghost. These have tested and found not wanting that

great emancipation from all spiritual shackles, " If the Son therefore, shall make you free, ye shall be free indeed". Their freedom takes on the color of their spiritual environment. They are like the children of the bride chamber who refuse to fast and mourn while the bride-groom is with them.

"Why should the children of a King
Go mourning all their days?"

For such have entered the kingdom of heaven and have found what Paul speaks of as, "the glorious liberty of the sons of God." They, no longer living after the flesh, but being born of the Spirit, do speak that they do know, and testify that they have seen the kingdom of God and that it implies no reception of "bondage unto fear" but produces a free spirit which cries Abba Father.

6. If love is the stimulus to right conduct and liberty, its essence is self-forgetfulness which marks the subject of the divine rule. Too long USE has motivated men's activities. Self-affirmation and the cold calculation of consequences have never characterized the world's great saviors. Self seeking was a contamination the thoughts of which, the Savior of the World refused to harbor. In his temptations, whether in the

wilderness or through the mouth of a disciple, there is always manifest that active antagonism toward, and stout refusal of the fraud of selfishness.

The doctrine of the survival of the fittest, whether political or economic, has never had a place in the realm Jesus founded. [In] the family spirit that exists between the heavenly Father and his children, constructive of helpfulness, the consequent outgrowth of tender love, is the prevailing rule. To the members of the kingdom, personality is greater than property and the life is more than meat. To this end, that men might find in mutual goodwill and aid the opposite of bitter struggle, Jesus offers the challenge of the Kingdom of righteousness, "If any man will come after me, let him deny himself and take up his cross, and follow me." Knowing that men are more often poor in their possessions than rich, realizing that they are more often inimical than at peace in the pursuits of this life, Jesus laid down the law of his realm which he himself best illustrated in such utter self abandonment---"whosoever shall save his life shall lose it; but whosoever shall lose his life for my sake and the gospels', the same shall save it."

V. Progress
of the
kingdom.

1. The problem as to whether God's universal reign shall come on earth or not has often been wrestled with. It has been a battle ground on which two kingdom views have been opposed--the optimistic and the pessimistic. Both sides have sought to find an answer to Christ's question, when the Son of Man cometh, shall he find faith on earth? One class claims that faith shall have persisted in the earth and in large degree triumphed. The other class questions the possibility of a kingdom of God here on earth with so much of opposition to righteousness. To those of the former class the question which Jesus asked is a challenge. To those of the latter it is a doubt on Jesus part as to the outcome of his gospel in the world.

Keeping the two views in mind when those who hold the unfavorable outlook pray, "Thy kingdom come", they virtually ask for the sickle to be laid to the grain whether it be undeveloped or mature. When those who hold the hopeful attitude toward the righteousness of God in the earth make the request, "Thy kingdom come," it is that the conditions favorable to growth and extension may abound. There is sometimes a tendency on the part of those who put the former meaning

into the petition, to engage in a sort of anxious waiting satisfied with endeavoring to snatch here and there a brand from the burning. Those who hold the developing view of the kingdom and posit that meaning in the petition in the Lord's Prayer are likely to go out enthused to help bring (so far as is possible) the rule of God here and now. The two views call for different modes of the kingdom's coming. One is willing to work through a long era and see the commonwealth of God slowly and gradually yet certainly develop--coming with out spectacular observation, while the other looks intently for a sudden laying of the axe to the root of the tree.

One of the most outstanding criticisms of the catastrophic coming of the kingdom is that it fails to properly evaluate the efficacy of the gospel of Christ. It under estimates the crusading power of God unto salvation while laying so much stress on the spectacular and its power to bring about the desired spiritual state. Bruce throws out a hint that is implied in the parable of "The Seed growing gradually," that after the long period of development allowed the seed between its planting and the grain-ripening, comes the

catastrophic work of the sickle, the ushering in of the consummated period, the perfected kingdom. Furthermore it has been argued that if a long era of growth had not been anticipated Jesus would not have been so pains-taking to train his followers and enthuse them for the redeeming work. His ministry is looked upon as a testimony to the fact that the kingdom which he instituted must be built on foundations deep and broad. No superficial or transient order was expected to find its basis on so thorough going a ground work as Jesus sought to prepare in those years of his ministry.

2. As to the qualities of growth in the rule of God, we have already anticipated. There are statements of Christ recorded in the gospels which have led to varied beliefs as to when and how the kingdom is to make itself felt among men. These texts seem to refer to a sudden and speedy *parousia* while others unmistakably denote a delayed coming. The former texts are looked upon as references to the kingdom's coming as judgment upon Israel even before the disciples should go through the cities of Israel or before some of those present should taste death. The one text which here gives exegetical trouble is that which states that, "This generation shall not

pass away till all these things be accomplished, /"

This however is thought to be the result of the compiler's habit of mixing together discourses which have no especial relevancy the one to the other. Some suggest that they are the contemporary eschatological interpretations of Jesus' sayings. So after all has been said and the evidence weighed there is a great deal spoken by Jesus which argues a long evolutionary period for the kingdom. His reign has its beginning in seeming insignificance which has been likened unto a mustard seed. It has its maturity in largeness and usefulness and has been likened to the full grown mustard tree. Between the planting of the germ in the ground and the branched tree there is a long period for sunshine and rain, storms and wind, cultivation and watching. Likewise between the initiatory step of the kingdom and its consumation there is room for disappointment and encouragement, faith and work. The kingdom as it enlarges is to permeate. It is to transform the face and life of society--leaven the whole lump.

We have then a very clearly defined method by which the rule of God is to make its way in the world. It is by growth. Life is its principle. God's kingdom

is one of small beginnings, with an ever widening and developing influence and an ever forward thrust. Its discription is more readily seen in the metaphor and simile of living growing things. Its history has followed closely this same method of spiritual agression. Beginning at Jerusalem thence to Judea, Samaria, and the uttermost parts of the earth the kingdom has been in a very genuine fashion the witness to the prophetic and directive mind of Jesus.

Realizing the principle of growth in the kingdom, the love of the Father, the privilege and duty of sonship, and the resourses at ready command, the children of light are prone to avail themselves the communion with God in this desire for his rule,---

"Thy kingdom come;
thy will be done on earth,
as it is in heaven."

Having made this petition to the Father, the children go out to help answer their prayer and bring in the good-will among men.