

A Prayer  
of Jesus

I thank thee, Father, Lord of heaven and earth, that thou hast hidden these things from the wise and understanding and revealed them to babes; yea, Father, for such was thy gracious will.

## CHAPTER VI

# THE KINGDOM OF GOD

## Definition of the Kingdom and its Coming

I have deliberately refrained from mentioning the Kingdom because we cannot understand it apart from the foregoing conception of the will of the Father. But now, it is the simplest thing imaginable. A kingdom, any kingdom, can be defined as the realm where the will of the king is done. So it is here. The Kingdom of God is not come where God's will is not done, because he is not there the king. Before Jesus, no one knew or did the Father's will on the earth, and so the Kingdom of God did not exist on the earth and God did not reign on the earth. But when Jesus died on the cross so as to go to the Father, then arose and ascended to the Father (as did the prodigal son), he did the will of the Father on the earth. He did it in such a way as to provide a continuing following of prodigals who likewise arise to go to the Father. It is thus that the Father's will is being done on the earth and that his kingdom has come on the earth. The incipient moment was the moment of the death of Jesus according to his own free will, when he yielded up his spirit – he being the first one to do the will of God on the earth. It was at that point that the Kingdom of God was come.

## Connecting the Kingdom to the Great Corollary

The coming of the kingdom was one of Jesus' primary concerns. Mark presents it at the very beginning of Jesus' teaching ministry when, in Mark 1:14,15, we read: Now after John was arrested, Jesus came into Galilee preaching the gospel of God, and saying, "The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God is at hand; repent, and believe in the gospel." This refrain, of the time fulfilled and the Kingdom at hand, almost here but not quite, was a constant throughout his ministry. He sometimes spoke and prophesied specifically of the time of its coming. Mark 8:34-9:1 is the perfect example, in which his prophecy of the coming of the kingdom is tied to the Great Principle:

If any man would come after me, let him deny himself and take up his cross and follow me. For whoever would save his life will lose it; and whoever loses his life for my sake and the gospel's will save it. For what does it profit a man, to gain the whole world and forfeit his life? For what can a man give in return for his life? For whoever is ashamed of me and of my words in this adulterous and sinful generation, of him will the Son of man also be ashamed, when he comes in the glory of his Father with the holy angels.

To this point he has emphasized the Great Principle in terms of saving and losing life in this world, and applied it to taking up our crosses and following him in this performance of the will of the Father as defined above. He is to be the first. All others are to follow him. He warns us of the consequences of an improper response to him and to his words when he comes in judgment, at the Parousia. But this reminds him of another, much more imminent coming, that of the Kingdom of God. Then he added:

Truly, I say to you, there are some standing here who will not taste death before they see the kingdom of God come with power.

## Tasting of Death

Why did he couch his prophecy in terms of tasting of death? Was it that he knew that the kingdom was to come during their lifetimes? No, he knew that the kingdom was to come so soon that "the time is fulfilled." Telling them that it was to come during their lifetimes would stretch the time out too far into the future in a context in which he emphasized the nearness. So that is not likely his point. It is far more likely that he used this language because he knew, that of all those standing there, he, alone, must taste of death for the kingdom to come. The others, the some standing here, would not taste of death until they had seen the kingdom come with power at the death of Jesus, but he must. Therefore the tasting of death was inseparably related to the coming of the kingdom in his mind. This is obvious to us now, in the simplicity of Jesus' doctrine, and you who are able to receive it will be astonished, as I was, and wonder why you never understood it before. It must have been a statement born of irony and about as near as Jesus came to being humorous.

## The Two Comings

One reason that many have not understood is that he uttered the prophesy almost in the same breath as the statement concerning his coming in the glory of the Father with the holy angels (Mark 8:38). An erroneous inference results from associating the two comings as one, but he did not say such and in retrospect we can see clearly that he never intended such. His Parousia, the Second Coming, is far removed from the coming of the Kingdom. Indeed, the coming of the Kingdom is not associated with his Second Coming at all but with his going – to the Father, through death and resurrection. He was always careful never to specify the time of the Parousia, once saying, No man knows, neither the Son, but the Father only (Matthew 24:36).

This confusion is further assisted by the error of associating the two comings, of the Kingdom and the Parousia, by associating two "Lo, here, Lo, there" sayings. The saying specific to the Kingdom is found in Luke's special material only (17:20, 21):

Being asked by the Pharisees when the kingdom of God was coming, he answered them, 'The kingdom of God is not coming with signs to be observed; nor will they say, "Lo, here it is!" or "There!" for behold, the kingdom of God is in the midst of you.

Therefore we must understand that there are no signs to herald the Kingdom – none that men can recognize in any case and its coming must therefore be unobserved, as it was. Men did not say, "Lo, here!" or "Lo, there!" for the simple reason that there were no visible signs attending its coming. The other saying is in Luke 17:23, 24 (Matthew 24:24-26):

And they will say to you, "Lo, there!" or "Lo, here!" Do not go, do not follow them. For as the lightning flashes and lights up the sky from one side to the other, so will the Son of man be in his day.

This applies to the Parousia, not to the Kingdom, and it is clear that the reason no one will be heralding the event with a "Lo, here!" or a "Lo, there!" is that absolutely everyone will see it. Two different comings: one absolutely invisible, the other universally visible. They cannot possibly be the same, even though they share one thing in common: There will be no "Lo, there!" or "Lo, here!" for either!

## The Kingdom Already Present

He sometimes spoke of the kingdom as already present, as in the saying above: "the kingdom of God is in the midst of you." I understand these sayings to mean that the kingdom was come in his presence and through his authority in performing signs and wonders and in casting out

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demons. He was, in this world, an invading force from another space, a beachhead of the kingdom, such that the spiritual authority of the kingdom was present in him because the Father's will was performed in him and through him. (Remember the essential definition of any kingdom – it is the place, realm, person, etc., where the will of the king is done.) It was not secure, however, and not effective outside his presence. You see, he was standing there, in the midst of them, when he uttered this saying. The coming of the Kingdom was not secure because there yet remained the possibility that Jesus would yield to the temptation to save his life. In that case he would not have been effective in bringing the Kingdom to earth because he would not have finally done the will of the Father on earth.

The Greek New Testament expression, *entos humon* (Luke 17:21), translated above as "in the midst of you" and often translated elsewhere as "within you" is severely misread when the latter translation is applied. The Kingdom of God was surely not inside the persons he was addressing – the Pharisees who were filled with enmity for him. In other words, the will of the king (God) was not being done within any of them. Had he been addressing a single individual, "within you" would have been the only possible reading; but in addressing a group, it simply means "within the group," and Jesus was standing there, in the midst of them, as the immediate personal representative of the Kingdom of God.

## The Strategy of the Enemy – the Fear of Death

Jesus understood that the power over the world, into which he entered as an alien invader (I am not of this world – John 8:23), was vested in Satan, the name given to the spiritual entity that had rebelled against God and had in consequence been cast down to earth. It was this spirit that offered Jesus the rule of the kingdoms of the world if he would bow down to him and, tempted him to use his powers for the benefit of the flesh and that tempted him to commit suicide by leaping from the temple. The wilderness temptations were early skirmishes in the long battle between Jesus and Satan, which was concluded victoriously by Jesus' death. Satan's strategy never varied. It was simply to succeed in tempting Jesus to save his life, as other men would have done, and so to lose everything (Matthew 16:25).

This had always been a highly successful strategy because it resulted in inspiring in all men the fear of death. Since the Father's sole will for us is that we come to him, this had effectively frustrated the will of the Father and secured the kingdom over the world for Satan. Therefore Jesus rightly recognized the voice of Satan speaking through Peter when the latter protested the first prediction of his approaching passion, saying "God forbid, Lord! This shall never happen to you!" And Jesus replied:

Get behind me, Satan! For you are a hindrance to me! You are not on the side of God but of men (Matthew 16:23).

It was this same Satan who unleashed all the power at his command against the solitary Jesus sweating blood in Gethsemane, tempting him to save his life by avoiding the cross. Had Satan succeeded, Jesus would have been fully as lost to the Father as any other man; the Father's will would not have been done on earth and his Kingdom would not have come.

So Jesus recognized Peter's voice as that of Satan, tempting him to save his life. He also charged Peter with being allied with men when he accused him of being on the side of men rather than the side of God. Thus it is clear that Jesus understood that men had allied with Satan against him, and the entire issue was focused on whether or not Jesus would fear death and save his life rather than go to the Father. Satan had made all men captive to him through imposing the fear of death upon all, and they thus became subservient to him in all things, opposing the sole will of the Father. The author of the Letter to the Hebrews had the perfect insight into what transpired at Calvary when he wrote:

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Since therefore the children share in flesh and blood, he himself likewise partook of the same nature, that through death he might destroy him who has the power of death, that is, the devil, and deliver all those who through fear of death were subject to lifelong bondage (Hebrews. 2:14,15).

All were bound to Satan through fear of death, but finally a single man broke the bonds by dying fearlessly so as to go to the Father. In that everlasting victory the power of Satan, and men subjected to him, was broken. Therefore the Kingdom was come and the risen Jesus could announce to the gathered disciples,

All authority, in heaven and on earth, has been given to me (Matthew 28:18).

The author of The Revelation likewise plumbed its mystery when he wrote,

And I heard a loud voice in heaven, saying, "Now the salvation and the power and the kingdom of our God and the authority of his Christ have come, for the accuser of our brethren has been thrown down, who accuses them day and night before our God. And they have conquered him by the blood of the Lamb and by the word of their testimony, for they loved not their lives even unto death" (Rev. 12:10,11).

(this is one of the very few places outside the gospels where the Great Principle is in evidence.) This, after just writing,

Then the seventh angel blew his trumpet, and there were loud voices in heaven, saying, 'The kingdom of the world has become the kingdom of our Lord and of his Christ, and he shall reign for ever and ever' (Rev. 11:15).

## The Time of the Coming Confirmed

Knowing that the coming of the kingdom was to be invisible, Jesus nevertheless wanted his disciples to be able to discern the time. Because Judaism generally understood the coming of the kingdom to be the visible restoration of the kingdom of David under a son of David who would wrest the kingly power from the Romans and establish Israel as the highest of the mountains (Isaiah 2:2), and because Jesus had not been able to shake their faith in this interpretation of the prophetic visions, he knew they were not ready for the Truth. Indeed they would at that time have been offended by it. Therefore he resolved to provide them with a clue that, in its immediate context, they would fail to comprehend, but would do so after the Holy Spirit had come upon them. So, at the Last Supper with his disciples, when he took up the cup, he said to them,

Take this and divide it among yourselves; for I tell you that from now on I shall not drink of the fruit of the vine until the kingdom of God comes (Luke 22:18).

Why would he say such a thing and why would the scriptures record it, if not to inform us of the exact time of the coming? The beverage in the cup was almost certainly *oinos*, the sweet wine in common use at meals but it was also a fruit of the vine, which occasioned his clue.

Now there was another beverage in common use, especially among the Roman soldiers, called *ochlos*, a sour wine, or vinegar, but which shared with *oinos* the valid description, fruit of the vine. Jesus knew that it would be this fruit of the vine that he would drink in conjunction with the coming of the Kingdom, which was to be coincident with his death on the cross as prophesied in Psalm 69:21: "And for his thirst they gave him vinegar to drink." This therefore became the clue to his disciples – to all disciples who would ever follow him -- as to the exact moment for the coming of the kingdom. He need only be careful to avoid drinking any fruit of the vine, either *oinos* or *ochlos*, until that moment – the moment of this death, when he must drink it to satisfy the clue.

And so, a few hours later, when they came to a place called Golgotha, which means the place of

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a skull, they offered him wine (*oinos*) to drink, mingled with gall; but when he tasted it, he would not drink it (Matthew 27:33,34; Mark 15:22,23). Now we know why he would not drink it. It was not because he was not thirsty, for he had had a sleepless night of agonizing in prayer, during which he won the most significant battle of all human history. He had been arrested and tried, brutally treated and condemned, all with no mention of anything to drink. The offer may have been a humanitarian gesture on the part of one of the soldiers charged with crucifying him. Yet in that state of extreme thirst, when he had tasted the beverage so as to identify it as a fruit of the vine, he would not drink it because the moment of the coming of the kingdom had not arrived.

Then they crucified him, it being about the third hour of the day (9 a.m.). For the next six hours of intense agony on the cross, he drank nothing and he asked for nothing. But then, at about the ninth hour (3 p.m.), John's gospel informs us,

After this Jesus, knowing that all was now finished, said (to fulfill the scripture), "I thirst."  
A bowl full of vinegar (*ochlos*) stood there; so they put a sponge full of the vinegar on hyssop and held it to his mouth. When Jesus had received the vinegar, he said, "It is finished" and he bowed his head and gave up his spirit (John 19:28-30).

As soon as he realized that his death was certain and imminent, as soon as he knew he had won the victory and would not save his life, he asked for the drink. We are told that he had at that moment the knowledge that all things were finished. The Kingdom of God was come. It was the pivotal event in the history of the world, and no one said, "Lo, here!" or "Lo, there!" because no one saw it. Jesus told us, if we can hear, that it is not coming with signs to be observed. What more could we ask? The Kingdom did not come with signs to be observed, nor will it. Nevertheless, Jesus, wanting us to know the exact moment so as to understand it, assayed to provide a sign coincident with its coming provided we are able to receive it. The Kingdom had come on earth in that the will of the Father was done on earth.

The churchmen – the learned doctors, the wise and understanding – cannot receive this simple truth primarily for the same reason that Jesus' immediate disciples were not prepared for it. They looked for the coming of the Kingdom of God in terms of a triumphant religio-political messiah who would cast out the Romans and restore Jewish independence under the prophetic Son of David so as to transform their world. When they had come together with the resurrected Jesus, their first question was, "Lord, will you at this time restore the kingdom to Israel?" (Acts 1:6). The churchmen are gripped by precisely the same error, insisting that the coming of the Kingdom accomplish the transformation of the world. It will never happen and it is so sad to see them, like the early prodigal son, vainly casting all their hopes for the Kingdom on the transformation and glorification of this far country

All are without excuse because he has done everything possible to bring the Truth to them. He has plainly stated that the Kingdom is not coming with signs to be observed, but they do not believe him. He has told them where their hearts are really set in saying, "Where your treasure is, there will your heart be also." This hope for a glorified earth is their treasure, their earthly treasure on which they have set their hearts, in violation of the Great Principle and in disobedience to the Great Commandment.

## The Coming was Consummate

There is nothing more to come, and those who cannot believe will miss it. That this coming was final and complete is evident in Jesus' use of the Greek aorist tense in predicting it.

I shall not drink of the fruit of the vine until the kingdom of God comes (*elthe*, aorist tense of *erchomai*, Luke 22:18).

This tense is applied only in speaking of an action that is point like, or both instantaneous and

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complete like a rifle shot. Its completion is also evident in Jesus' post resurrection statement,

All authority, in heaven and on earth, has been given unto me. (Matthew 28:18).

The word 'all' applied to both heaven and earth leaves nothing out, does it? Therefore the Kingdom must have come in its completion. Nothing yet remains. All authority has been invested in Christ our king, and all things are done under his authority and according to the absolute will of the Father.

Since the crucifixion of Jesus, all authority to govern nature, supernature, men, the spirits and all things in heaven and on earth issues from the Father through his son Jesus Christ, the Lord of lords and King of kings. It does not issue either from the battlefield or the ballot box. This fact is exceedingly difficult for men to accept because they have their hearts set on a certain vision of righteousness on earth, and certain things, such as the Nazi Holocaust to take an extreme example, cannot be fitted into that vision. This is a mystery that, like all the others, has a simple solution, which I hope to declare in the discussion of free will below.

## The Essence of Sin

We are now in a position to define the essence of sin, and it will be convenient to go back to the prodigal son and recall some of the characteristics of that story. The son was in a far country according to his own will and desire; he had abandoned his father and his father's house in order to go out to that far country and pursue a life of his own, independently of his father. This self-willed action was all contrary to the will of the father, who only wished his son to be in his house enjoying the fruits of the father's domain.

Life in the far country turned sour, but it would not have altered the specifics of his case had it been otherwise. The fact was that, for so long as he abode in the far country, there was absolutely nothing he could do to please his father apart from desiring to go home to his father. This was because there was only one thing the prodigal's father wanted of him – come home!

Apart from a positive response to this one desire of his father, everything he might be and do in the far country was a transgression of the father's will. This was for the simple reason that it was conducted in the far country and in the pursuit of a self-willed existence in that country. His sin consisted in his transgression of his father's will, who only wanted him to come home to the father's house. Righteousness before the father was an impossibility while he devoted himself to the pursuit of his life in the far country. Was he a good and honest man, upright and of great integrity, who loved his neighbor as himself? Even this is of no consequence while he continued to set his heart on life in the far country. All was sin – even his righteousness was sin – when pursued in the context of his devotion to that life.

So, likewise, we are all ultimate sinners before God the Father while we devote ourselves to life in this world, which is our far country. This leads us directly to the Great Principle of Jesus: He who loves his life loses it, but he who hates his life in this world will keep it for life eternal! Jesus stated it numerous ways: Whoever seeks to save his life will lose it; whoever seeks to find his life will lose it. Or, Whoever finds his life loses it, but whoever loses his life for my sake will keep it. This is the core issue, the essence of sin, and until we have dealt with it, as did the Prodigal Son, all our righteousness is as filthy rags in God's sight. Absolutely nothing we can do within the context of love for life in this world pleases the Father, whose only desire is that we turn to His house, devoting ourselves from the heart to the eternal glory.

## Examples: The Rebellious Child

What parent among us cannot understand this simple conception? Let us say that one has a child who turns rebellious and in late adolescence ceases his family obligations, desiring only to

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be free of the parental yoke. He demands his inheritance, or whatever he can get. Then he leaves home to seek his own life in the world with no consideration for the wishes and desires of his parents, which include educating and equipping him for the life that is before him, but most especially the yearning for his love and companionship. Can any parent be happy with such a son, whatever the results of his life in the far country?

Whatever we do that hinders our devotion to the Father in heaven, and to the eternal life in his house, is sin. All earthly affections, including the affection for family and friends, that bind us to the earth, are sin. Every earthly object of devotion competes with God in our hearts so that every such devotion is sin. This applies especially to familial devotion, to close relatives and friends, because our relationship with God the Father, if it exists, is a family relationship. That is why Jesus stated so emphatically,

If any one comes to me and does not hate his own father and mother and wife and children and brothers and sisters, yes, and even his own life, he cannot be my disciple (Luke 14:26). Because God in heaven wants to be our Father, our only Father, he can brook no earthly, competing fatherhood. That is why Jesus said, also very emphatically, Call no man your father on earth, for you have one father, who is in heaven (Matthew 23:9).

## Patriotism

This also specifically includes devotion to the state or nation. Patriotism (literally, fatherism), defined in terms of devotion to ones earthly country, lies at the very root of sin because it is an offense to God, our only legitimate father. Jesus spoke specifically to this issue once, but once is enough. When asked if it was lawful (from the Jewish point of view) to pay tribute to Caesar, he replied by asking to be shown the tribute coinage. Then he displayed the coin and said, "Whose image and inscription is this?" They replied truthfully, "Caesar's." Then he responded,

Render therefore to Caesar the things that are Caesar's, and to God the things that are God's (Matthew 22:21).

Now they all understood him, for all were well aware of the Genesis creation story, according to which God created man in his own image. The message is astonishingly clear: devote to Caesar, to the government, the tax – for it bears his image; devote that which bears God's image only to God – never to Caesar or the state. Jesus not only answered their question, he also used the occasion to pronounce a profound truth about human relationships. Devotion to the Father alone is righteousness; devotion to anything other than Him, be it family, state, or any earthly cause is sin pure and simple.

## The Essence of the Kingdom

All that I have written above concerning the significance of the Kingdom of God will prove unconvincing to most people. They will continue to insist on seeing material results of the exercise of authority by the king. So powerful in the hearts of men and women is the vision of the transformation of the world that they will never relinquish it so as to be receptive to the Truth. I am hopeful, however, that some of you, some few, are at the point of conviction in this matter. For you there is another thing the Lord has revealed that I wish to share, and it is so basic that I think it can be described as the essence of the Kingdom. If this does not convince you, I do not know what would, and to those unconvinced I can only say, "God loves you; may he in his mercy help you!"

The essence of the Kingdom can be seen in the context of the tribute question discussed briefly above, where I showed that this discussion about the coin with Caesar's image clearly defines the

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limits of human devotion. It is an either/or matter, according to which we may devote ourselves either to Caesar or to God, but never to both. We human beings on earth are the images of God; this indicates clearly that only God has a legitimate claim upon us, so that we are to render only to God what is his. Let Caesar have that which bears his image; it is of no value to the Father.

### Comparison with the Roman Empire – a Province of Heaven

But now, let us look at that teaching from a different perspective. Let us look at it from the perspective of the Father in heaven, and let us interpret his Kingdom according to the pattern of the kingdom of the Caesars when Jesus was ministering in Israel. The kingdom with which they dealt was with them every day, and they understood it very well. It is a distant part of even our history, and we should also be able to understand it. According to this pattern, Caesar stands as the king, and the territory of the Jews was part of a province under his royal authority. The kingdom of the Caesars had come to Judea when Pompey conquered Jerusalem in 63 BC. It then became a province of Rome, or rather a part of the Roman province of Syria.

What difference did the coming of the kingdom of Caesar make in Judea? If we look at the details, there were many, but here we seek only the essence, where we see few significant differences. The people continued to suffer under unjust rulers as before but there was stability in the state, which made the new governance, if not acceptable, at least tolerable for the Jews.

There were three very significant changes that transpired with the coming of the kingdom of the Caesars:

- the quartering of Roman troops whenever the Romans thought it necessary,
- the calls to worship Caesar as divine that the Jews to their credit never ceased to resist,
- and the payment of tribute to Rome in coin of the realm, bearing the image of Caesar.

The first two of these were occasional issues during periods of political tension and were largely unenforced. While the Jews lived in a peaceful and orderly state, they had no fear of Roman troops and Caesar appears to have accommodated himself to the fact that the Jews would never worship him.

One thing never failed: the collection of tribute. One might say that, from the royal point of view, that is, of Caesar, he was very satisfied with his province while it continued to produce the tribute levied upon it. This, the collection of tribute, was the primary and constant difference imposed upon the Jews by the coming of the kingdom of the Caesars. Caesar looked to his province to produce, year by year, those little images of himself and was generally satisfied when they were transported to his house (to Rome). Their arrival confirmed that his authority was recognized in the province of Judea, that his kingdom ruled over all.

So likewise with the whole earth; with the coming of the Kingdom of God it became a province of heaven, and heaven is happy with earth only when it is producing the tribute levied upon it – those little images of God the Father that we call human beings. Of course, the royal expectation is that the people of earth will worship God as God, who seeks always to quarter his troops on the planet. These are the true disciples of Jesus who directly represent his government in the province.

Yet after all is considered, the coming of the Kingdom of God to earth has made one constant difference: year after year his tribute has continued to be levied upon it and somehow it must have been paid. Otherwise, he would have done to it something similar to what the Romans did to Jerusalem in AD 70. This, then, is the essence of the Kingdom of God on earth: He has



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established his authority to levy tribute, those images of himself, by means of the work of Jesus. By the power of his holy Word and the Holy Spirit he has consistently enforced his authority and collected his tribute. Indeed, Jesus was himself the first tribute rendered to heaven by earth, proving the coming of the Kingdom of God to the earth with his death and departure therefrom to the house of the Father. Every kingdom is the realm where the will of the king is done. So with the Kingdom of God, using the above definition of the will of the king.