

Sermon Subject: THY KINGDOM COME

Scripture: Matthew 6:9-15 (Inspired Version)

After this manner shall ye pray, saying, Our Father, who art in heaven, Hallowed be thy name. Thy kingdom come. Thy will be done on earth, as it is done in heaven. Give us this day our daily bread. And forgive us our trespasses, as we forgive those who trespass against us. And suffer us not to be led into temptation, but deliver us from evil. For thine is the kingdom, and the power, and the glory, for ever and ever, Amen.

In those days came John the Baptist, preaching in the wilderness of Judaea, and saying, Repent ye: for the kingdom of heaven is at hand.

It is significant that when John the Baptist came preaching, he did not say that the kingdom of heaven was going to be available in some far off, distant day and time; it was available then. "The kingdom of heaven is at hand." Jesus expressed the same idea somewhat later when he said, "The kingdom of God is within you." Some people have interpreted this verse to mean that the kingdom is in the individual heart. Since Jesus was speaking to the Pharisees, it is not plausible to believe that the kingdom of which he was speaking was within them, or in their hearts. A marginal note in the King James version reads, "Or among you." Another version says "The kingdom of heaven is in the midst of you." Still another says, "The kingdom of God has already come unto you." Moffat says "The reign of God is now in your midst." The Emphatic Greek Diaglott says "God's royal majesty (that is, the King) is among you." A very recent study of this passage and of the Greek preposition translated "within" has arrived at the conclusion that the real meaning of the passage is, "The kingdom of God is available unto you."

Whichever of these renditions you prefer, the idea runs through them all that the kingdom of God is not some far-off, impossible-to-be-achieved ideal, but a reality which exists now. On another occasion Jesus himself said, "The Kingdom of God is come unto you." Christ is the King of this Kingdom, His laws are the laws of the Kingdom. His subjects will obey his will and his commandments. We can be citizens of his kingdom NOW, at this very moment, or any time we choose to accept him as King, and obey his laws completely, unreservedly, sincerely, instead of half-heartedly, fearfully, with reservations and backward looks at the kingdoms of this world in which we have heretofore trusted. The kingdom is available NOW; is at hand, is among you, has already come unto you.

Notice that this idea is expressed again in the Lord's prayer. The first portion of that prayer recognizes that the kingdom has not yet come because men are not yet willing to do God's will on earth as it is done in heaven. We are therefore taught to pray in the future tense: "Thy kingdom come." But the conclusion of the prayer changes the tense of the verb completely, and speaks of the kingdom as present, existing now, available now: "Thine is (not thine will be, someday) Thine is the kingdom." The kingdom is God's. It exists now. It will come to us and exist for us just as soon as we are willing to obey all of God's laws, and do his will on earth as in heaven.

Because it costs so much and requires so much to live by kingdom laws in everyday human relationships, and because we cling so tenaciously to our pet sins, our petty hatreds, fears, resentments, angers, sorrows, remorse, and guilt complexes, we do not have the kingdom. We have attempted to spiritualize the

kingdom, and say that it is some vague, intangible thing which exists in the human heart, but not in demonstrable, tangible, concrete form. Because we have said that the kingdom exists only in the human heart, we have denied that the laws of the kingdom had anything to do with such practical affairs as wages and hours, banking, and stock market, economics, politics, finance, industry, agriculture, education, public health, or the problem of war. We pay lip service to the kingdom for an hour or two on Sunday, but utterly refuse to live by its practical laws during business hours. The world still waits upon a people who will obey the laws of the kingdom in all the practical, tangible, material things, as well as in spiritual -- who will live out the laws of stewardship individually and collectively, and make the kingdom a reality here and now, on this earth, in our time.

It should be noted at this point, however, that no man can live the law of God perfectly in isolation. Christian living, or living in obedience to the laws of the kingdom, consists not only in right attitudes of the heart and mind and spirit, but also in right action. John says: "If any one has the world's goods and sees his brother in need, yet closes his heart against him, how does God's love abide in him? Little children, let us not love in word or speech, but in deed and in truth." (I John 3:17,18; Rev. Standard) Right action demands the presence of other people with whom and for whom we can perform our actions in accordance with the kingdom laws.

Kingdom living consists not only in right relationships between man and God, but in right relationships between man and man. It is impossible to love God as we ought, and at the same time to hate our neighbor. John says further: "If any one says, 'I love God,' and hates his brother, he is a liar; for he who does not love his brother whom he has seen, he cannot love God whom he has not seen." (I John 4:12, Rev. Standard) Love at its best cannot be one sided; it must be reciprocal. Even if we grant that it is possible for a man to love one who hates him, under such conditions there cannot be full, satisfying, efficient, or mutually beneficial relationships between such a pair unless they love each other and work with and for each other. One man might be ever so good, completely Christ-like in his love for fellow men, and in doing God's will, but he could not live as he would like to live, or as he ought to live, so long as the people around him would not reciprocate, and join him in cooperative obedience to the laws of the kingdom.

In other words, a community of people, regenerate, obedient, willing, and eager to do God's will on earth, can do that will more completely, more efficiently, and more easily than individuals isolated in the midst of opposing wickedness. One man paying tithing can do some small good, but he alone can never preach the gospel in all the world, to every nation. But many men paying their tithes to an organized group such as the church, which is formed for the express purpose (among others) of promulgating the gospel in all the world, can fulfill Christ's command to go into all the world and preach the gospel in a way that no one man could do alone. One man who is willing to devote his surplus property to the common good would be foolish to give it into the hands of selfish, wicked, ungodly unregenerate men. But if a group of men like himself could join together, pool their surplus wealth for the good of all, the kingdom law could be lived among them more fully, more effectively, more efficiently. Even in the matter of giving temporary relief to the poor and needy as a prelude to their rehabilitation, one man can do comparatively little. But if he joins his efforts with the efforts of other kingdom-minded men like himself, the little which he is able to contribute can be used to best advantage, with highest efficiency of results.

There is still another reason for "togetherness" in these kingdom of God relationships. When one man or one family is surrounded by people with worldly

ideals, people whose moral principles or standards of conduct are slightly or radically below standard, it is difficult for adults to maintain their Christian standards, and it is still more difficult to rear the children of the family according to those standards, when they are constantly confronted with the bad examples and the social pressures of those about them. It is always difficult for one to stand up against the many for what he believes to be right. But when a group of like-minded people can live together, each furnishes the example and the incentive for all the others to do right. Children can grow up in righteousness, with the moral force of the crowd, the community, the neighborhood, on the side of the highest type of Christian ideals.

Latter Day Saints historically have been and currently are concerned with a concept or an ideal which they call Zion. Zion is a combination of several things. Zion is a people -- called out of the world, gathered together for the sake of fellowship in economic and industrial affairs as well as in spiritual. Zion is a people who are trying to obey and to live out the laws of the kingdom in the practical affairs of life. Zion is a people who have been regenerated by the power of Christ and his gospel, so that they desire to live the laws of the kingdom. Zion is a condition; it is the pure in heart. Its citizens are those who have experienced the regenerating powers of Christ and his gospel ordinances, who have made full consecration of their lives, whose motives are unselfish, whose aim is peace. Zion is also a place -- a location -- to which these people gather. Zion is also a social and economic order, including various organizations, associations, and instrumentalities by which social and economic ideals can be implemented and given practical application. Zion is the kingdom of God on earth, subject to civil law until Christ comes, but acknowledging Christ as King and ruler, obeying his laws, doing his will on earth as it is done in heaven.

The history of the Latter Day Saints movement is largely a history of attempts to establish such a community, and to make the ideal a reality. As early as 1832 Jackson County, Missouri and the "regions around about" were designated as the physical location for Zion. Early attempts at colonization failed because of the antagonism of the earlier settlers, caused in part by lack of wisdom on the part of the Saints and by their opposing attitudes on the slavery question. Another attempt was made a few years later in the newly formed counties to the north, and a new city was named Far West; but this experiment was likewise ended by persecution and open warfare against the Saints. The next attempt was at Nauvoo, Illinois which in its heyday was the largest city in the state of Illinois -- larger even than Chicago at that time. Continued persecution resulted in the death of the prophet and leader Joseph Smith in 1844 and the ruthless scattering of the people again.

For many years after the death of Joseph Smith, the members of the church remained scattered. Some went to Utah, under the leadership of Brigham Young. Other colonies under various leaders sent to Texas, to Wisconsin, to California, to Iowa, to Pennsylvania. In 1860, the son of Joseph Smith, affectionately known as "Young Joseph," was called by some of these scattered remnants which had continued the church in congregational form but without any central government, to take his father's place at the head of the church. Its quorums and councils were reorganized, and again the people began to look towards the ideals of Zion which they still held dear. Young Joseph's advice to the church was not to undertake any mass movement of people, but to gather quietly and slowly as opportunity offered, establishing themselves by their industry and sobriety, and awaiting the promises of the Lord that Zion should not be removed out of her place. A beginning was made when a parcel of land was secured in southern Iowa, and the town of Lamoni laid out in the midst of a thriving agricultural community. To this town the church moved its headquarters and its publishing house.

Meanwhile the Saints had been gathering, one family at a time, back to Independence, out of which they had been driven in 1833. In 1878, there were only 35 members in Independence. In 1879 these few began to plan the building of a chapel in Independence, which was completed in 1881, and paid for and dedicated on July 1, 1881. By 1887, the thirty-five had grown to four hundred and eighty, and the need for larger quarters was urgent. The corner stone for the Stone Church was laid April 6, 1888. Today we have nineteen congregations in the Independence area, with approximately ten thousand members. In addition, there are large centers of church organization and population at Warrensburg, Kansas City, and St. Joseph, Missouri, within an hour's driving time of the church's headquarters in Independence.

In spite of our numerical growth, many of the ideals which we hope to bring to practical fruition are still waiting for the willingness and obedience of our people. Still, the ideals of Zion are the motivating force which brings our people to Independence and the surrounding regions. It is the purpose of those who gather that there might be established here such organizations of agricultural, industrial, economic, financial, and religious endeavor, that we can implement and demonstrate the laws of the kingdom of God which we profess to believe. We gather to Zion, the place, in order that Zion, the people, the pure in heart, the practical demonstration of the kingdom of God, might be. We gather to Zion that here we might escape from the sins and perils which abound in a world that needs to learn obedience to the laws of God's kingdom. But more important still, we gather to Zion, and we work and pray for the coming of Christ's kingdom, in order that from that kingdom there might go forth the example of righteous, godly, cooperative living together, which shall give power and conviction to the gospel message which we are commissioned to take to all nations.