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# The New Testament Teaching on the Kingdom of God

By W. ARNDT

**T**he Frequency of Occurrence of the Term "Kingdom of God" in Our New Testament Literature. The term "kingdom of God" or "kingdom of heaven" occurs 119 times in the New Testament, according to Edersheim. Matthew is the only New Testament writer who uses the term "kingdom of heaven." It is found 32 times in his Gospel. But he does not confine himself to this particular phrase in the discussion of the concept; he likewise uses the term "kingdom of God," employing the phrase five times, and six times in his references to this subject he speaks simply of "the kingdom."

*Kingdom of Heaven Is a Synonym of Kingdom of God.* All exegetes apparently are agreed that St. Matthew uses the term "kingdom of heaven" in the same sense as "kingdom of God." They are not in agreement, however, as to the reason for this variation. Some hold that Matthew prefers the term "kingdom of heaven" because he follows the usage of the Jews at his time, which prescribed that the name of God should be pronounced as seldom as possible (so Edersheim). Others hold that this peculiarity of Matthew's phraseology must be explained as due to the desire to bring out that the kingdom of which Christ and the Apostles were speaking did not originate on earth, but in heaven, and that hence its character is not an earthly, but a divine, a heavenly one. Thus Heinz-Dietrich Wendland thinks it possible that the term emphasizes the transcendent character of the kingdom (cf. *Die Eschatologie des Reiches Gottes bei Jesus*, p. 15). Since in Matthew's Gospel there is no tendency otherwise to avoid mention of the name of God, it seems his frequent use of the term "kingdom of heaven" should not be explained as dictated by the wish to avoid uttering the holy name of God, but rather as due to the beautiful meaning attaching to the term, which is pointed to by Wendland.

*John the Baptist's Preaching About the Kingdom.* At the very portal of the New Testament, so to speak, we find the proclamation of the kingdom of God or of heaven (lit., the heavens). When Matthew has concluded the infancy narratives, he brings the heroic figure of John the Baptist before us and reports these words of his: "Repent, for the kingdom of the heavens has come near" (Matt. 3:2). It is remarkable that this ringing pronouncement is not interpreted by the Baptist or the Evangelist.<sup>1</sup> If John explained the term "kingdom of heaven" to his hearers, that explanation is not reported to us. It did not require any interpretation, for his hearers understood what he meant. The term had come to be a technical one and was frequently employed by the Jews in their religious discussions. "It is coming, the kingdom, the long-expected kingdom; the glow presaging its arrival is visible on the horizon." So must have run his message.

*Kingdom (Realm) or Reign?* Here we come upon a much-discussed question. In our Lutheran circles it has been quite customary to look upon the term "kingdom of God" as an equivalent for the word "Church." The true Christian Church, the invisible Church, consisting of all believers, was held to be designated by the term "kingdom of God." In fact, these expressions were looked upon as synonymous. Modern scholarship is quite unanimous in emphasizing that *basileia* in the preaching of John and of Jesus at least often means "reign" or "rule," that it frequently is a *nomen actionis*. The term certainly is used in Greek literature in the sense of rule or reign. To give an instance: In Thucydides I, 13, kingdoms are contrasted with tyrannies. In the early days there had been kingdoms, he says, but then there came tyrannies. It is clear

<sup>1</sup> The Jews of the time of Christ were well acquainted with the term from the Old Testament. Edersheim refers to the O. T. teaching on this subject in glowing words: "This rule of heaven and kinship of Jehovah was the very substance of the Old Testament; the object of the calling and mission of Israel; the meaning of all its ordinances, whether civil or religious; the underlying idea of all its institutions. It explained alike the history of the people, the dealings of God with them, and the prospects opened up by the prophets. Without it the Old Testament could not be understood; it gave perpetuity to its teaching and dignity to its representatives. This constituted alike the real contrast between Israel and the nations of antiquity and Israel's real title to distinction. Thus the whole Old Testament was the preparatory presentation of the rule of heaven and of the kingdom of its Lord." *Life and Times of Jesus the Messiah*, I, 235.

that here "kingdom" means rule, the reign of a king, just as tyranny means the rule of a tyrant, a usurper of supreme authority. Other instances could be adduced showing that the term *basileia* is used as an abstract noun, denoting action.<sup>2</sup>

But it must not be overlooked that it likewise frequently has a concrete meaning signifying kingdom, domain, realm. Josephus naturally uses the word often, and in a number of instances it has the latter sense in his writings.<sup>3</sup> Kittel, for the New Testament, points to Matt. 4:8; 24:7; Mark 3:24; 6:23 as passages where this meaning is found. The subject must not detain us too long. Zahn's view is sane and tenable when he in his *Grundriss der neutestamentlichen Theologie* takes the position that the term is used in both meanings in the New Testament. He writes (p. 7): "Abstractly considered, the *basileia* is the royal rule of God over the world when this rule has been fully established, or, to put it differently, the condition of the world and the arrangement of affairs in which the will of God has become the sole determining factor (Matt. 6:10). Taken in the concrete sense, the *basileia* is the human race and the world when it has become altogether subject

<sup>2</sup> The Septuagint can be helpful here. In Judith 1:1 the author says: "In the twelfth year of the reign (*βασιλείας*) of Nabuchodonosor" etc. It is evident that "realm" would be an altogether unsuitable rendering of *βασίλεια*. A passage containing the same meaning of the term is Esther 3:6: "And he (i. e., Haman) resolved to destroy all the Jews under the rule (*ὑπὸ τὴν βασιλείαν*) of Artaxerxes." If the preposition were *ἐν*, the meaning "realm" would be indicated; but *ὑπὸ* compels us to translate "reign." In 1 Macc. 1:10 Antiochus Epiphanes is said to have become king in the 137th year of the reign (*βασιλείας*) of Greeks ('Ελλήνων, without the article). The translation "kingdom" is out of the question because there was no kingdom of the Greeks; but Syria and Egypt were *ruled over* by Greeks. Daechsel's commentary well explains the expression by rendering *Herrschaft der Griechen*. 1 Macc. 1:16 is of special interest. The King James Version renders it: "Now when the kingdom (*βασίλειά*) was established before Antiochus, he thought to reign over Egypt, that he might have the dominion of two realms" (*βασιλείας*). An admirable translation is that of Dr. Goodspeed in his book *The Apocrypha*: "When his rule appeared to Antioch to be established, he conceived the idea of becoming king of the land of Egypt, so that he might reign over the two kingdoms." Anybody can see that here the word *βασίλεια* occurs in both meanings, that of "rule" and of "realm."

<sup>3</sup> In Ant. XII, 2, the Egyptian king Ptolemy Philadelphus is said to have been urged by Aristaeus to set free the Jewish captives throughout his kingdom (*κατὰ τὴν βασιλείαν αὐτοῦ*). Here the word *βασίλεια* evidently signifies realm, or land. In *ib.* 3 the Jews who previously had been in the kingdom (*προικιζόντας ἐν τῇ βασιλείᾳ*) are spoken of — another clear case of the use under discussion.

to the will of God and has adapted itself to this will.<sup>4</sup> The abstract meaning obtains, or at least is more prominent, in the passages where the approach or the beginning of the *basileia* is spoken of (Matt. 3: 2; 4:17; 6:10; 12:28; Luke 17:20); the concrete meaning in the passages where our entering into the kingdom is mentioned (Matt. 5:20; 7:21; John 3:5), or where the kingdom is spoken of as a treasure (Matt. 5:3; 11:12b), or as a community of subjects (Matt. 13:41). But since the two thoughts, although conceptually they can be differentiated, can hardly be regarded as two distinct notions, in many instances the meaning we assign to the term is merely the more prominent, not the exclusive one." Accordingly we have to determine in the light of the context whether in a given passage the term should be rendered "rule" or "realm."<sup>5</sup>

*The Preaching of Jesus and of His Apostles Was Kingdom Preaching.* As John the Baptist, so Jesus, too, proclaimed a message of the kingdom. The Forerunner had said: "The kingdom of heaven has come near"; that precisely was the announcement of

<sup>4</sup> This is strange language to most of us. Zahn has in mind the ultimate condition of the world which obtains when the Judgment has been rendered and the Kingdom of Glory has been fully inaugurated.

<sup>5</sup> A word on the relation between the kingdom of God and the Church is in place. It should be noted that the New Testament never says that these two terms are equivalent. In the discourses of Jesus, handed down in the Gospels, the word "church" (*ἐκκλησία*) occurs only twice, and both times in Matthew's Gospel (16:18 and 18:17). While *βασιλεία* can be used both in an abstract and a concrete significance, *ἐκκλησία* has only a concrete meaning. It is employed, however, in a wider sense, designating all believers in Christ (f. i., Eph. 5:25), and in a narrower sense, signifying a local congregation (f. i., 1 Cor. 1:2). That there may be intermediate meanings, can be seen from Acts 9:31, where Luke speaks of the *ἐκκλησία* in all Judea, Galilee, and Samaria. The difference between the two terms will best be visualized if one remembers that *βασιλεία* really means "reign" or "rule," and *ἐκκλησία*, "assembly." God reigns in the hearts of those that form the assembly, that is, the Church, and it is true that through the gracious reign of God, exercised in the Word and the Sacraments, the Church is created and maintained, but the difference between the abstract and the concrete confronting us here should not be ignored. But how about instances where *βασιλεία* is used in the concrete sense of "realm"—does it not there become a synonym of church? Not altogether, is my reply; there remains the distinction between "people" and "assembly," although often they can be used interchangeably. The connotations are different. When we hear the word *ἐκκλησία*, we think of a meeting (in the concrete sense); *βασιλεία* suggests the thought of a nation, ruled over by a king. Christ is the King of God's holy nation; He is likewise the Head of the Church. So we are dealing with related concepts. But it is well to keep the original meaning in mind.

Jesus (Mark 1:16; Matt. 4:17). It is quite remarkable with what frequency the Gospels record statements about the kingdom uttered by Jesus. The Sermon on the Mount has a number of passages in which the term occurs. In the parables it is largely some point pertaining to the kingdom that is clarified or emphasized. That Jesus must have been known as a preacher of the kingdom is indicated by the question of the Pharisees reported Luke 17:20, in which they asked Him when the kingdom of God was coming. Various opinions might be offered as to why they approached Him thus. The most plausible explanation seems to be the type of message which He had been proclaiming. "You always talk about the kingdom. When will it appear?" Regardless of what others dwelt on, He was teaching about the kingdom of God, and this was known wherever people had received information about His message. When Jesus sent forth His Apostles for the first time, He gave them this instruction: "Go and preach, saying: The kingdom of heaven is come near" (Matt. 10:7). Luke reports the same detail, ch. 9:2. That likewise was the message of the seventy whom Jesus sent forth a little later (Luke 10:9). The note that is sounded is always: The kingdom of God has come near. In the rest of the New Testament the term is not quite so prominent. That it had its definite niche in the apostolic teaching, we can see, for instance, from Rom. 14:17, where Paul, when warning the Christians not to drop into unbrotherly conduct over the questions of food and wine and the observance of certain days, strikingly says: "The kingdom of God is not meat and drink, but righteousness and peace and joy in the Holy Ghost." Apparently the concept was well known to his readers, and a mere allusion to it was sufficient.

*In a Number of Passages the Kingdom is Viewed as Lying in the Future.* As we are endeavoring to establish one detail after the other pertaining to Jesus' teaching on the kingdom, we come upon a number of passages in which the kingdom is definitely spoken of as belonging to the future. His initial message, "The kingdom of heaven, or of God, has come near" bears this out. The hearers would have to say that the message informed them of the proximity of the kingdom, but not of its presence; hearts and desires were still directed to the future. Think of passages like

the following one where this view is in evidence: "Thy kingdom come" (Matt. 6:10): "I say to you, of a truth, there are some of those standing here who will not taste of death until they will see the kingdom of God" (Luke 9:27); "I shall not from now on drink of the fruit of the vine till the kingdom of God has come" (Luke 22:18); "Then shall the King say unto them on His right, Come, ye blessed of My Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world" (Matt. 25:34). The kingdom lies ahead, according to these statements, not indeed the preparation of it, but its revelation, its appearance. Cf. the words of the penitent malefactor (Luke 23:41) and the reference to Joseph of Arimathea (*ib.*, v. 51).

*The Preaching of the Kingdom Is Eschatological.* Bible readers have long noticed that in many of the New Testament passages which speak of the coming of the kingdom, the end of the world and the opening of the era of everlasting glory are referred to. When the kingdom appears and the present universe collapses, the final catastrophe is, as it were, the explosion which tears the veil hiding the kingdom from our view. Perhaps no passage expresses this more forcefully than the words of Jesus reported Luke 21:29-31: "And He spake to them a parable: Behold the fig tree and all the trees; when they now shoot forth, ye see and know of your own selves that summer is now nigh at hand. So likewise ye, when ye see these things come to pass, know ye that the kingdom of God is nigh at hand." The whole context had dealt with the liquidation of the present world. When that is accomplished, the kingdom of God appears. The grand description of the Judgment scene, Matthew 25, which has been referred to before and which speaks of the inheriting of the kingdom on the part of the righteous at the great assizes is, of course, strongly confirmatory of what has just been said.

*The Kingdom of God is Likewise Viewed as Present.* Granting everything that has been stated in the preceding paragraphs, we cannot close our eyes to the existence of another group of New Testament passages in which the kingdom is spoken of as present. That may seem startling, but is undeniable. The question of the Pharisees as to the time when the kingdom would come has been mentioned (Luke 17:20). The answer of Jesus must have amazed

those controversialists: "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." I take the meaning of the last words to be: The kingdom is in your very midst; the trouble is that you do not know it. The kingdom is likewise thought of as present in the words of Jesus, Luke 16:16: "The Law and the Prophets were until John; since that time the kingdom of God is preached, and every man presseth into it." The kingdom, says Jesus, has been founded, and men are now striving with might and main to enter it. The present tense can well be regarded as the so-called conative present. The point is that people try to get into the grand realm just as they are, without repentance, with all their sins and passions left intact; and that, as Jesus emphasizes, cannot be done. The very similar passage, Matt. 11:12, is intended to teach the same truth: "And from the days of John the Baptist' until now the kingdom of heaven suffers violence, and the violent take it by force." The violent ones, according to the interpretation adopted here, are the haughty, presumptuous, and proud religionists, who hold that, if anybody, they certainly are entitled to be members of the kingdom. The present tense here, too, is conative. "They try to take it, but do not succeed." But what is of importance for our purpose just now is, that the kingdom of God is here regarded as present, as existing. Here we may think, too, of Matt. 12:28: "If I cast out devils by the Spirit of God, then the kingdom of God is come unto you." The *protasis* states a fact; so does the *apodosis*. Satan is overcome; another rule is established, the rule of God.

*The Harmonization of the Two Teachings on the Kingdom Last Surveyed.* Somebody might reach the conclusion that, speaking as we have been about the kingdom, we have been running into a definite contradiction. But that opinion is unfounded. Certainly the Gospel writers did not hold that they were presenting conflicting views, otherwise they would not have written as they did. Heinz-Dietrich Wendland goes into this problem with some thoroughness (*op. cit.*, pp. 50—53). He finds the solution in the peculiar character of God's rule or dominion, which will be revealed in its fullness at the end of time, but which likewise transcends all time. He operates with the terms *endzeitlich* and *ueberzeitlich*. What



he says seems hardly in keeping with the simple thought processes of the New Testament. I prefer Zahn's position (*op. cit.*, p. 15), who, after having dwelt on the kingdom as present, says: "While all this is true, the complete consummation and visible presentation of the rule of God and the final definite establishment of the communion of the kingdom (*Reichsgemeinde*) remain a matter of the last times and an object of hope (Matt. 13:39 f.; 49 f.; 16:28; 25:34; Luke 9:27; 22:29)." Yes, we enjoy the blessings of the kingdom, and still we daily pray: Thy kingdom come. The treasure is with us, but a certain veil still covers it. The leaven is at work, but how quietly, unobtrusively, secretly, it does its work!

*The Kingdom is Inaugurated by God; It Is Not a Product of Human Wisdom or Natural Development.* On this head not much has to be said; all who accept the New Testament are agreed that the caption is true. Can we lay our finger on definite statements? Mark 4:26-29 the Evangelist writes: "And He," that is, Jesus, "said: So is the kingdom of God, as if a man had cast seed into the ground and should sleep and rise night and day, and the seed should spring and grow up, he knoweth not how. For the earth bringeth forth fruit of herself, first the blade, then the ear, after that the full corn in the ear. But when the fruit is brought forth, immediately he putteth in the sickle, because the harvest is come." The lesson that Jesus teaches is: The kingdom is God's production; it is through His power that it grows and develops; man is not calling it into existence or making it prosper. As Wendland correctly says (*op. cit.*, p. 36), the proponents of an evolutionistic theory of the kingdom who have sought Scriptural proof for their position in this little parable are altogether in error. The New Testament knows nothing of a theory of evolution. The salient point rather is the difference between the infinitesimal beginning and the impressive close of the whole process, which constitutes a miracle of God. Expressions like "building the kingdom of God," "kingdom-of-God tasks" are not found in the phraseology of Jesus. Wendland calls them modern pietistic formulas. All views of human co-operation, he avers, are excluded if we bear in mind that *basileia tou theou* really means the reign, the rule of God. When that thought is adhered to, the Christian will not be tempted to think that he must or can join in bringing in the kingdom.

It is certainly significant that we are instructed to pray: Thy kingdom come. We can indeed pray for the coming of the kingdom, but we cannot usher it in ourselves. God Himself must act and begin His rule.

*Jesus as the Messiah Establishes the Kingdom.* When John the Baptist proclaimed: "Repent ye, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand," he was understood by his countrymen to say, and he clearly meant to say, that the Messiah was coming, through whom the kingdom was to be made a reality. The startled people, hearing about the nearness of the kingdom, were wondering whether he was the Messiah; it was a question which his preaching had evoked. They were absolutely right in connecting the bringing in of the kingdom with the Messiah's advent. They understood correctly that God establishes the kingdom through the Messiah. So it was with the first disciples of Jesus. When Andrew, as related John 1:35 ff., had been with Jesus and soon afterwards met his brother Simon, he told him: "We have found the Messiah." Philip is called by Jesus the next day, and he says to his friend Nathanael: "We have found Him of whom Moses in the Law, and the Prophets did write, Jesus of Nazareth, the Son of Joseph." And when Nathanael met Jesus and the Latter manifested His omniscience, Nathanael exclaimed: "Rabbi, Thou art the Son of God, Thou art the King of Israel." Kingship and Messiahship, we note, are joined together. That Jesus taught that through Him the kingdom was to be founded, is unmistakably brought out in His parable of the wedding feast and the wedding garment, Matt. 22:1 ff. "Jesus," so says the Evangelist, "answered and spoke unto them again by parables and said: The kingdom of heaven is like unto a certain king which made a marriage for his son," etc. The Son, as becomes evident, is Jesus Himself. The guests that are invited will not come; so others are brought in that had not originally been given an invitation. This, then, is the way God brings the kingdom into existence. He sends His Son and issues a gracious invitation to people to enjoy the treasures which the Son offers. The looked-for reign or domination of God begins with the coming of Jesus, we say. The consummation of it, as we have seen, is eschatological; it belongs to the end of all time.

*The Kingdom is to be Regarded as a Real Reign or Dominion.*

Repeatedly reference has been made to the "reign of God" as one of the meanings which the term "kingdom of God" possesses. God will reign, is the proclamation. The thought is a tremendous one. The meaning, evidently, is that God will be recognized as King, and His will will be done. The hearts now addicted to sin and service of selfishness will then belong to Him, and people will be eager to recognize what is pleasing to Him and to carry it out. A beginning of this reign is made now whenever men accept Jesus as their Savior and pledge Him their loyalty. But how partial, how incomplete it is! Not only are there comparatively few who accept Jesus as their divine Helper, but even in their case the obedience which is rendered is far from perfect. Sin still enters in and mars their service. "Not as though I had already attained, either were already perfect" — all those who accept Christ as their Redeemer have to say with St. Paul. But this, we confidently hope, will be altered when the great Day of the Lord arrives. After the present universe has collapsed and a new heaven and a new earth have been created by God, then there will exist a world in which righteousness dwells, a world in which the will of God will be done perfectly, as it is done now by the angels in heaven. And there will no longer be found children of God living alongside the children of the Evil One. "The Son of Man will send forth His angels, and they shall gather out of His kingdom the 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" (Matt. 13:41-45). In uttering these grand and at the same time searching words, one wonders whether Jesus means to say that up till Judgment Day His kingdom will contain both righteous and unrighteous people. But that evidently is not the meaning. The words "The angels shall gather out of His kingdom all things that offend" simply mean that there will be a complete separation, while at present these two classes are living side by side. The unjust now often appear to be under the same sway and rule as the just. But it will be different in the end.

*The Message of the Kingdom Is Good News; It Is Soteriological.* An important point is to be considered here. The New Testament looks upon the preaching of the kingdom as the proclamation of

joyful news. Think of Mark 1:14 f.: "Now after John was put in prison, Jesus came into Galilee preaching the Gospel (that is, the *euangelion*) of the kingdom of God and saying: The time is fulfilled, the kingdom of God is at hand; repent ye, and believe the Gospel." (The better text reads simply: Jesus came into Galilee preaching the good news of God; it is quite apparent, however, that the difference in reading has no bearing on the present argument.) The beginning of the Sermon on the Mount comes to mind: "Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven" (Matt. 5:3). We see, to have that kingdom, to be under its sway and dominion, signifies true bliss. Great advantages are conferred by it. Those people are to be congratulated who sustain this relation to God. The possession of this kingdom means that one has purchased the pearl of great price (Matt. 13:46). This character of the kingdom was, of course, to be expected because the Messiah, the loving Savior, is its Founder. Since Jesus is establishing the kingdom, we have a perfect right to let the following gracious words describe the treasures He offers in the kingdom: "Come unto Me, all ye that labor 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). In this kingdom there is forgiveness of sin, God's favor, a place in the arms of Jesus, and a home in heaven. The proclamation of the kingdom, then, definitely belongs to the sphere of soteriology. It announces the establishment of a new covenant, the covenant of grace, mercy, pardon. It is entirely wrong to think of the founding of the kingdom as of the formation of a new ethical society, whose sole aim is to work for the observance of certain grand moral ideals. That Jesus proclaimed important ethical principles we shall soon see. But the main thing in the dominion of God is that He freely gives grace to sinners. That feature is its center, its very heart. (Cf. Wendland, *op. cit.*, p. 80.)

*One Becomes a Citizen of the Kingdom Through Faith in Christ, Which Faith is Created by God Through the Means of Grace.* This point is somewhat of a corollary to the foregoing one. At the side of the great fact that the proclamation of the coming of the kingdom is something that should warm and thrill our hearts and

make us rejoice is put the other fact, that it is easy to enter the kingdom, that the only thing we have to do is to apprehend in faith the good news of the establishment of the kingdom and to accept Jesus as our Savior. "Repent, and believe the Gospel," or "believe in the Gospel," Jesus Himself says in the passage quoted before, Mark 1:15. Paul, who places such tremendous emphasis on faith in Jesus as the Sin-bearer, would no doubt have said, if he had employed this terminology of the kingdom, that one enters this realm by the road of faith. Let us look at a few more statements of our Lord Himself. The Gospel of St. John abounds in passages spoken by Jesus in which faith in Him is stressed; but the synoptic Gospels, too, though with less frequency, report words of His in which He expresses the truth that through faith in Him we become citizens of the kingdom. We think of the words spoken in the Temple on Tuesday of Holy Week, quite annihilating to the proud opponents of the Savior (Matt. 21:31 f.): "Verily I say unto you that the publicans and the harlots go into the kingdom of God before you. For John came unto you in the way of righteousness, and ye believed him not; but the publicans and the harlots believed him; and ye, when ye had seen it, repented not afterward, that ye might believe him." It is plain that through trust in the coming Redeemer whom John preached, people who had been vile sinners were received into the kingdom. One more passage: The parable of the sower is a kingdom parable, for in explaining it to His disciples, Jesus says to them: "Unto you it is given to know the mysteries of the kingdom of God" (Luke 8:10). And now let us note the role which faith or believing plays in the interpretation. The Word is taken from the heart of the inattentive hearers so that they do not come to *believe*. In the case of the superficial hearers we meet people who believe *for a while*, but in the season of temptation they fall away. Thus there can be no doubt that it is through faith that we come under the gracious sway or dominion which we call the kingdom of God. A stupendous truth. If our age on a large scale could grasp it, we should witness a new and blessed reformation. That the means of grace are given to bring us into the kingdom is stated directly of Holy Baptism in John 3:5, and indirectly of the Word in all those passages where the Gospel is spoken of as the instrument through which faith is created.

*The Gifts of the Kingdom Are Great Beyond Description.* What is offered to those that accept Jesus the Savior and King and become citizens in that blessed realm of which He is the Ruler is not wealth, not power, not health, at least not directly. The great advantages bestowed are spiritual. Think of the Beatitudes. Those that are under the loving rule of God are given the peace that the world cannot give, the peace which passeth all understanding. With the forgiveness of sins they have received rest for their souls, a joyful outlook upon the future, the assurance of heavenly bliss, and with this righteousness all other things will be added unto them (Matt. 6:33). God will take care of their bodily needs too. As a kind Father He will not forget them when the ills of life come and the burdens of suffering grow heavy.

*The People Belonging to God's Kingdom Serve Him in Good Works.* When Jesus interprets the parable of the sower, He says with reference to the hearers that are represented by the good ground: "That on the good ground are they which in an honest and good heart, having heard the Word, keep it and bring forth fruit with patience" (Luke 8:15). Here, indeed, you have works that please God, they are good, honorable, helpful. Since the whole New Testament testifies that the faith which makes a person a citizen in God's kingdom is not a dead faith, but one that is active, I shall not labor this point. Let me merely say that the fight against the notion that a mere intellectual acceptance of certain definitions is the key to the kingdom, must never cease. A great number of aspects of the truth here before us come to one's mind. For instance, the Messiah, so John the Baptist proclaimed, will baptize not merely with water, but with the Holy Spirit. Whatever other blessings He may have for His followers, one grand endowment which He will bestow will be the Spirit of God. We know how important a role the teaching pertaining to the Spirit occupies in the message of Paul. In the Messianic kingdom the Spirit, not the letter, will rule the hearts; that is, not the Law, but the Gospel, through which the Spirit works, will be the governing factor. But now think of what Paul says about the result of the enthronement of the Spirit in our hearts, Gal. 5:22 f.: "But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, long-suffering, gentleness, goodness, faith, meekness, temperance"—quite an impressive catalog.

*Jesus Himself States that in the Kingdom No Easy Morality will Hold Sway.* The friendship which Jesus manifested toward publicans and sinners may have led people to suppose that under the reign of God, which He was inaugurating through the Messiah, there would be a relaxation of the stern moral standards which the Decalog proclaimed. If anybody took such a view, he overlooked that when Jesus exhibited special cordiality toward the so-called sinning class, it was only toward penitent representatives of it that He said: "Your sins are forgiven; go in peace." He did indeed not shun contact with these moral outcasts even before they had repented, because He knew that they were the sick members of the community who needed a physician. But His word of gracious acknowledgment, recognizing people as belonging to His disciples, was spoken to those only who had humbled themselves in true contrition and repentance. Everybody, says Jesus (Luke 16:16), is trying to rush into the kingdom with all the baggage of iniquity which he owns. But then He adds some stern words: "It is easier for heaven and earth to pass than one tittle of the Law to fail" (v. 17). And at once He grows very concrete. With respect to divorce many of His contemporaries felt they might do as they pleased. So He says (v. 18), "Whosoever putteth away his wife and marrieth another, committeth adultery; and whosoever marrieth her that is put away from her husband, committeth adultery." But our chief evidence that Jesus by no means proposed to let the dominion He was establishing be one of indulgence for men's favorite sins is the Sermon on the Mount. One feels that a number of His hearers, clinging to some pet wrongdoing, must have been disappointed when they heard Him declare that He had not come to destroy the Law and the Prophets: "For verily I say unto you, till heaven and earth pass, one jot or one tittle shall in no wise pass from the Law, till all be fulfilled" (Matt. 5:18). And then came a blast which must have been perfectly withering: "For I say unto you, that except your righteousness shall exceed the righteousness of the scribes and Pharisees, ye shall in no case enter into the kingdom of heaven" (v. 20). No do-as-you-please, no *laissez-faire* policy here! What is right is right, what is wrong is wrong. Do not expect to enter the kingdom if you refuse to acknowledge these eternal verities. Do not think that the osten-

tatious but superficial righteousness of the scribes and Pharisees will suffice. The hearers must have stood breathless and aghast as Jesus uttered these words, because the scribes and Pharisees were paragons of righteousness in the eyes of the ordinary people. If nothing else brought home to the hearers that the kingdom of God was intended to promote the highest moral excellence, it must have been this word of the divine Master.—If you reflect a little, you have to say: How could it be different? God is the Holy One, to whom sin in every form is foreign and an abomination. How could His reign, His sway, be one in which the doors are opened for wrongdoing? The character of God forbids our entertaining anything approaching such a view.

*The Righteousness of Life Which the Citizens of the Kingdom are to Exhibit Must, in the First Place, Be Inward, a Righteousness of the Heart.* Those that are in God's gracious realm have a perfect righteousness, the righteousness of faith. But it must be accompanied by a righteousness of life, which, alas! will not become perfect here on earth; but perfection must be striven for nevertheless. The tree must be good before it can bring forth good fruit. It is, as Luther so often says, not the good fruit that makes the tree good, but the good tree produces good fruit. Now, while Luther here has in mind the truth that a person must be justified before the fruits of sanctification can follow, we can use the same words in speaking of the necessity of making the heart pure, clean, loving, in order that outward deeds that are acceptable to God and men may follow. That is the way the Savior Himself treats of this subject. Listen to these words, recorded Matt. 12:34 f.: "Generation of vipers, how can you say good things, being evil? For out of the fullness of the heart the mouth speaks. A good man out of his good treasure produces things that are good, and the evil man out of his evil treasure produces things that are evil." Jesus insists on it that the thoughts, the heart, the will, have to be of the proper kind; if that is the case, the right deeds will follow. Cf. Luke 11:39-41: "Now, you Pharisees cleanse the outside of the cup and the platter, but the inside is full of plundering and wickedness. Fools! Did not He who made the outside make the inside too? However, give alms with your heart, and behold, all things are clean for you." First let the heart be pure, is the instruction.



We all recall how Jesus in the Sermon on the Mount puts anger and sinful lust on a level with the open transgressions of the divine Law. In the latter passages we definitely have kingdom instruction, but I do not think that anyone will question that in the other passages, too, in fact, in all the various ethical injunctions which Jesus gives to His disciples, the life in the kingdom is what He has in mind.

*All Ethical Instructions of Jesus Center in That One Word "Love."* Against the petty legal niceties and learned but vain quibblings of the scribes, Jesus puts one commandment as embodying everything that is demanded of the citizens of the kingdom, the commandment of love. As Mark reports, ch. 12:28 ff., a scribe asked Jesus: "Which is the first commandment of all? And Jesus answered him: The first of all the commandments is: 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 neighbor as thyself. There is none other commandment greater than these. And the scribe said unto Him: Well, Master, Thou hast said the truth, for there is one God, and there is none other but He, and to love Him with all the heart, and with all the understanding, and with all the soul, and with all the strength, and to love his neighbor as himself, is more than all whole burnt offerings and sacrifices. And when Jesus saw that he had answered discreetly, He said unto him: Thou art not far from the kingdom of God." The scribe was not yet in the kingdom, but, at any rate, he understood the fundamental tenet governing man's conduct in the kingdom. One need not expatiate on the emphasis which Jesus gives to love in the Sermon on the Mount — love of one's enemies, love of all men, as God, so Jesus points out, is kind and merciful to all people, regardless of their attitude toward Him. It is the thing which Paul proclaims with kindling eloquence, especially in 1 Corinthians 13. We are accustomed to saying that when there is some doubt as to the course we ought to pursue in a given case, we should appeal to the law of love, and let it decide. That is certainly in keeping with the teachings of Jesus.

*The Non-Resistance Teaching Must be Viewed in the Light of*

*the Law of Love.* A section of the Sermon on the Mount which has caused interpreters much trouble are the words reported Matt. 5:38 ff.: "Ye have heard that it hath been said: An eye for an eye, and a tooth for a tooth; but I say unto you that ye resist not evil; but whosoever shall smite thee on thy right cheek, turn to him the other also; and if any man will sue thee at the law and take away thy coat, let him have thy cloak also. And whosoever shall compel thee to go a mile, go with him twain. Give to him that asketh thee, and from him that would borrow of thee turn not thou away." These words, so baffling to us as we approach them with our common-sense morality, are followed by the great command to love one's enemies. It is impossible to submit here a long discussion of this *crux interpretum*. To me it seems plain that Jesus is here giving illustrations how we should apply the law of love, emphasizing that there must not be any feelings of vengeance, of vindictiveness in us, when we are being wronged. It follows that if the law of love requires resistance, we should resist; and we can appeal there to Jesus Himself, who says that there is no higher law than the law of love.

*The Interimsethik Idea of J. Weiss and A. Schweitzer Must be Rejected.* Whoever has remained somewhat abreast of discussions in the field of New Testament scholarship knows that the two theologians mentioned sought an explanation of the stern moral commandments in the Sermon on the Mount and elsewhere in the teachings of Jesus, in the assumption that these principles were not meant to be of everlasting validity, but were to obtain for the interim only between the appearance of Jesus as Prophet and His return as the heavenly Messiah for the consummation of the world—an interim which according to the view of Jesus, so they asserted, was to last but a year or so. The matter, on account of the scholarship and ability of the two chief proponents, aroused a good deal of discussion when first proposed. Now it is resting safely in the museum of discarded theological theories. One may be grateful to these scholars for having brought to the fore with unequalled clarity the eschatological character of Jesus' teaching. Their one-sided presentation, resulting in strange vagaries, we deplore, and their destructive views we reject. In 1924 Maurice Jones wrote: "It is now being generally recognized that Schweitzer

and his school attached an importance to Jesus' eschatological outlook that is not justified by a sound and reasonable exegesis" (*The New Testament in the Twentieth Century*, second edition, p. VII).

*Jesus Did Not Regard the Kingdom as a Political Force or Entity.* It is universally admitted that Jesus by no means posed as a political reformer or innovator. "My kingdom is not of this world," He emphatically declared (John 18:36). If people hoped that He fomented a revolution to sweep away the disgraceful regime of Herod Antipas in Galilee, and perhaps the whole Roman sovereignty in Palestine, quite irksome to patriotic Jews, they must have been quickly disillusioned when they heard this simple Rabbi speak the eternal truths of God, and say, for instance: "Blessed are they which do hunger and thirst after righteousness, for they shall be filled. . . . Blessed are the pure in heart, for they shall see God" (Matt. 5:6, 8). He sought something more important than political reforms, the reform of the hearts of people through true repentance. The problems of mankind are not so much centered in things outward as in things inward, was His position. The very men who apparently were the foremost moral pillars of His day He criticized severely because their so-called righteousness was one of external conduct, not of the heart. The passage in Matt. 23:25, not yet quoted, although a parallel passage has been cited, brings this out: "Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, because you clean the outside of the cup and the dish, but on the inside they are full of rapacity and uncleanness. You blind Pharisees, cleanse first the inside of the cup in order that the outside also may become clean." So we must dismiss altogether the thought of Jesus as of a political Reformer in His building of the kingdom. The objective He had was spiritual: repentance, regeneration of the people of this earth. The view of the modern social-gospel exponents that one feature of the kingdom of God as preached by Jesus is the proper kind of political government, probably a government which makes the Sermon on the Mount its *magna charta*, is certainly not justified by a study of His sayings. His Sermon on the Mount was not meant to be a political document. Jesus never addresses Himself to states or governments, but always to individuals or groups of individuals, such as, for instance, the population of Jerusalem. He never men-

tions the Roman Empire as an insatiable octopus, destroying the freedom of one country after the other; and the serious, grave, and almost disastrous political errors of Pontius Pilate are not once alluded to by Him. Change of heart, change of our attitude toward sin and toward God—that is what He was preaching.

*The Presence of the Kingdom Is a Great Asset to a Country in Political and Social Respects.* While Jesus was not at all a political Reformer, let no one think that His teaching has no bearing at all on the well-being of the body politic. One merely has to think of the high goal He announces Matt. 5:20 to see the relevance of His kingdom for society in general. The people in whom the rule of God holds sway, who have received forgiveness of sins and now dedicate their lives to God in gratitude, will be good citizens. They will strive to overcome the selfishness innate in the heart and truly to love their neighbor as themselves. They will seek the well-being of all their fellow citizens. Everybody likes to be where there are true children of God, because there he can be sure of safety for himself and his family and of receiving aid when it is needed. If it were not for sin, which still resides even in the best of the disciples of Jesus, a community of real Christians would be Paradise here on earth. The reborn state of a person who belongs to the kingdom will show itself in his political actions, if there is an opportunity for it. When voting, he will cast his ballot conscientiously. If he is a public official, a mayor or a governor or president of the United States, he will perform his work not with an eye to the plaudits of the multitude, but to please His heavenly King. In social endeavors of the community he will gladly participate as far as they are directed to the improvement of social and economic conditions. To fight poverty and unemployment, to eliminate the slum districts, to combat vice, to promote temperance, and to provide for the orphans and others who are stranded, he will gladly exert himself to the full. The progress made in the Roman Empire in the field of morals and charity after Christianity had become the ruling religion eloquently witnesses to the truth of what is asserted in this paragraph.

*The Preaching of the Gospel Through Which the Kingdom Comes Is the Only Help the Church Can Offer the World in Its Present Chaos and Suffering.* In viewing the question: What can

the Church do for the world in this crisis of unspeakable woe and suffering? there is only one answer: It must preach the Gospel through which the kingdom of God comes. That means, it must, God granting His grace, make people believers in Jesus so that they will accept His forgiveness and become new creatures, receiving a new orientation, so that, instead of hatred and selfishness, love and the spirit of kindly forbearance will fill the soul. In that respect we have to admit we have been slow and remiss. The great majority of Christians have not exerted themselves to have the good news of the kingdom proclaimed as much as they could and should have done. Who of us can say that he in this matter is without fault? It will probably be said that the past history does not bear out the contention that the hope of the world lies in the spread of the Gospel, because countries which made the claim to be Christian have been eager to wage war, and the recent holocaust was not started by the Chinese or some idolatrous African tribes, but by a Christian nation. Our reply is, that in some countries which are rated as Christian the real Gospel of Jesus Christ has comparatively few loyal followers. Furthermore, we say that, owing to environments, special circumstances, past history, and other factors, the old selfishness in man succeeds in carrying even many disciples of Christ into a wrong course. The present chaos is not evidence that Christianity is wrong, but that sin is a tremendous power. The present aspect of the world should certainly humble us. It must remind us, too, that our real hope is not that conditions here on earth will ever become ideal, but that when the great consummation comes, God will create a new heaven and a new earth where righteousness dwelleth. So, while we work with might and main to have the Gospel reach as many people as possible and do our very best to let it become a power in the lives of our fellow men, our gaze soars beyond this world and its imperfections to heaven, whence in due time the great King will come to usher in a new era, one that will be everlasting and where all our pious longings will finally be fulfilled.

*Membership in the Kingdom Does Not Imply the Adoption of Asceticism.* It might be thought that on account of Jesus' insistence on a better righteousness than that manifested by the scribes and Pharisees, He actually inculcated an ascetic attitude toward the

possession of earthly goods, eating and drinking, marriage, and social enjoyments. There is nothing, however, in His words that would substantiate such a view. It is true that He tells His disciples to deny themselves, to take up their cross daily, and to follow Him. But a careful study of such sayings will show that Jesus in them is speaking of the suppression of one's sinful impulses and not of contending against the ordinary human feelings, inclinations, and appetites. Let Luke 7:33 f. be considered here: "John the Baptist came neither eating bread nor drinking wine, and ye say, He hath a devil. The Son of Man is come eating and drinking, and ye say, Behold a gluttonous man and a winebibber, a friend of publicans and sinners." Jesus indeed points to the danger inherent in the possession of riches; He makes it very evident, too, that if our remaining in the kingdom requires great sacrifices, we should be willing to make them. Cf. Mark 9:47 f.: "If thine eye offend thee, pluck it out; it is better for thee to enter into the kingdom of God with one eye than having two eyes to be cast into hell fire, where their worm dieth not and the fire is not quenched." Jesus did not prescribe fasting; neither did He forbid it. What He does oppose in severe terms is the hypocrisy which is practiced in connection with fasting; cf. Matt. 6:16 ff. Paul voices the chief thought to be expressed on this point in 1 Cor. 7:20 ff.: "Let every man abide in the same calling wherein he was called. Art thou called being a servant? Care not for it. But if thou mayest be made free, use it rather. For he that is called in the Lord, being a servant, is the Lord's freeman; likewise also he that is called, being free, is Christ's servant. Ye are bought with a price; be not ye the servants of men." Not outward ascetic conduct is what is essential. The thing that counts is that God rules in our hearts, that He forgives our sins, and that we belong to Him. That no one can serve two masters must be remembered and is given much emphasis by Jesus. If earthly things threaten to usurp the first, the foremost, place in our thinking and affections, then it is time to discard them.

*Membership in the Kingdom Does Not Keep One from Being a Loyal and Active Citizen in One's Country.* On account of the importance of the truth here pointed to, it is well to devote a paragraph to it. The view arises quite naturally that whoever is

a citizen in God's kingdom should not occupy himself with the affairs of his earthly country more than is absolutely necessary. But that position evidently is erroneous. What Jesus does condemn in no uncertain terms is the selfish striving for honor and power which we find quite generally with politicians and which is not compatible with true Christian humility and the love we owe our neighbor. But nowhere does Jesus declare that membership in the kingdom makes it impossible for a person to hold an office in the State, to be a governor or ruler or magistrate. When we consider His strong words urging us to serve our fellow men in the best way possible, we must conclude that if such service can most effectively be rendered through our entering politics, we should not hesitate to take that step. Abstaining from the assumption of political power and honor is an outward matter. It is as little necessarily good and commendable as so-called asceticism. This whole matter calls for a thorough re-study and fresh examination.

*The Citizens of the Kingdom are Assured God's Gracious Protection.* To be in God's kingdom implies that we obey God in everything we do, to the best of our ability. But let it not be forgotten that it implies likewise that the King furnishes us the protection we need. The very relation toward God in which we find ourselves assures us that in the hour of need and trouble He will not forsake us. Whether the enemies assailing us belong to the secular or the spiritual realm, whether they are visible or invisible, His powerful arm will furnish us the aid we need. The comforting words of the Master recorded Luke 12:32 we cannot consider too frequently: "Fear not, little flock, for it is your Father's good pleasure to give you the kingdom." And let these words from His high-priestly prayer be recalled, John 17:24: "Father, I will that they also whom Thou hast given Me be with Me where I am, that they may behold My glory, which Thou hast given Me before the foundation of the world."

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