

The Kingdom of God, the Fellowship of the Saints

Youth Discussion
Saturday, July 7, 2007

LLC SUMMER SERVICES, LONGVIEW

What is the Kingdom of God?

"For the kingdom of God is not meat and drink; but righteousness, and peace, and joy in the Holy Ghost. " (Romans 14:17)

The Kingdom of God is a refuge from the temptations and evil that are in the world, a sheepfold where the Good Shepherd cares for His sheep. It is a spiritual home where travel friends share that which is most precious in life, and a place where believers can together trust in the redeeming grace of Jesus Christ.

We have Jesus' own words that speak to us of this kingdom:

"Again, the kingdom of heaven is like unto treasure hid in a field; the which when a man hath found, he hideth, and for joy thereof goeth and selleth all that he hath, and buyeth that field. Again, the kingdom of heaven is like unto a merchant man, seeking goodly pearls: Who, when he had found one pearl of great price, went and sold all that he had, and bought it." (Matthew 13: 44-46)

These words from the Gospel of Matthew show us two examples of something found after being diligently sought after. In both cases all other possessions were given up so that great treasure could be owned. In these parables Jesus compares personal faith to a great treasure. You and I own this great treasure. It is a treasure, which, once owned, should be guarded with special care and watchfulness so that we would not lose it.

Can this treasure of living faith, once found, be lost? How is this possible? Can one who has been born into a believing home, or perhaps has come into this marvelous light from the outer darkness lose that great treasure, or gift, that God has given? Unfortunately yes, it can happen. There have been cases where the threefold enemy has overcome those who have not been diligent and watchful travelers.

"The Christian Doctrine of our church teaches about the condition of sorrowlessness, the call of God, the time of visitation and the rejection of God's call. If the Holy Spirit cannot care for one after being baptized as a child in the unity of Christ, the spirit of the world overcomes the heart of that person. He but faintly longs for God and eternity. He may feel the emptiness of his life, and at times sin may bother him, but he does not sense that the most important matter to him should be salvation of his soul. Such a condition is called sorrowlessness. Sometimes the Holy Spirit can awaken a sorrowless sinner through experiences of life, suffering, and the example of others, but especially with the Word of God. There are times in the life of man when God especially draws a person to him. Such a time is called a time of visitation. But this time of visitation does not apply only to unbelieving people who God calls from darkness into light. This call

can also be heard by the child of God who travels with a divided heart in the dusk between darkness and light. Will the call be accepted or rejected? The decision is in man's power. Many defenses may come to mind to avoid being placed in the light before the face of God.

Thus one can sink ever deeper into sorrowlessness and the heart can become hardened. Hardening is a condition of soul where one has closed their heart to God's Word. Often this hardening can be permanent and final.

Today, a time for making repentance is still given, but if the time of grace is not taken seriously the conscience can become darkened forever." God is not always to be found, as the prophet Isaiah says, "*Seek ye the Lord while he may be found, call ye upon him while he is near.*" (Isaiah 55:6)

God's Kingdom has Borders

Why do we say that God's Kingdom has borders and why is this important? The example has been made of a sheepfold where the Good Shepherd watches over his sheep. If the sheep remain close to the shepherd they know they are safe. But if one strays to the outside of the flock, close to the edge, or the border of the sheepfold, there can be great danger because one strays far away from the Good Shepherd. To the one who strays too close to the outside the grass can look much greener and more tempting on the outside of the sheepfold. There are many things beyond the border of the sheepfold that could entice and tempt one who strays. The things of this world will entice and tempt the child of God. Our own corrupt flesh is too often ready to stray. The enemy of souls will whisper that a little fun and enjoyment with those tempting things will be OK. We would do well to remember that the enemy is a liar and those things that tempt a believer can be very dangerous. This is especially true in the time in which we live. How much better to remain close to the Good Shepherd and in the care of His Kingdom!

What does God's Word tell us about associating with those outside of the Kingdom?

"Be ye not unequally yoked together with unbelievers: for what fellowship hath righteousness with unrighteousness? and what communion hath light with darkness?" (2 Cor. 6: 14)

This portion of Scripture may cause us to wonder about relationships we may have with those on the outside. Does this mean that we must shun those who are not believers and associate only with brothers and sisters in faith? Not at all. But there is here a place of watching for all of us.

We are reminded here that there are in this world two kingdoms: That of light and that of darkness. There is certainly nothing wrong with having friends outside of God's Kingdom. To be unequally yoked together, however, means that there is a danger of becoming too close to those on the outside and beginning to partake of things that would be a danger to one's life of faith. We could use as an example those who departed years ago when a great heresy swept God's Kingdom. Most of you perhaps were not even born when that heresy took place. You may know children of some of those who left the Kingdom. It's possible that they may live much as we do, they may say "God's Peace" to one another and live relatively decent lives. They may seem very similar to us, but yet we must remember that they are on the outside. There are not two kingdoms

of God, only one. They are either with us, or they are not. There can be no other way, even if our flesh would wish it to be so. There is here a place of watching for a child of God when thinking of these former travelers: A young child of God may see those who belong to a heretic church who live much as we do, but who partake of things in this world that we do not. One may begin to wonder: If they can do these things, why can't I? If they do not have burdened conscience by partaking of the things in the world, why should I? Here is where we need to remember the words of the Apostle quoted previously.

Too close association with unbelievers, whether they have once been in living faith, or are in a heresy or have always been in the world can result in believers being led into sin. We may, for instance, begin to question the position taken in Living Christianity in the past concerning such things as: bowling, hunting and fishing on Sunday and playing cards. We may also begin to follow the world too closely in the clothing we wear, our hairstyles, and so on.

Issues that may cause questions in the minds of believers who associate too closely with unbelievers are:

1. Sexuality: God's children condemn premarital sex, common law relationships and extramarital sex as being in opposition to the teachings of the Bible.
2. Children: Are gifts from God. Birth control is a sin of this time in this world.
3. Television: Due to bad programming, this should not be in a believing home.
4. Alcohol and drugs: Defile the entire body, which is the temple of the Holy Spirit.
5. Sports: Competitive sports are not acceptable, but we should maintain fitness through various forms of exercise.
6. Videos: Always a concern in God's Kingdom that they would be appropriate.
7. Internet: Has dangers to believers, but is a working tool for many of us.

It is also appropriate to consider tobacco use in this connection. People outside of God's Kingdom notice that some underage members of God's Kingdom use tobacco products. Schoolteachers and principals, as well as others who work in close association with our youth especially notice this. This can shed a bad light on God's Kingdom, since they wonder why believing youth would indulge in behavior that the law of the land is trying to actively discourage.

An Open Door

We have now spoken of the Kingdom of God, of how the Kingdom has borders, and of not being unequally yoked with unbelievers. Now we must also speak of maintaining an open door to those on the outside. Does this seem contradictory? How can we remain safe from the many temptations in the world and yet maintain an open door?

To begin with, we can trust that the Heavenly Father will care for us if we, through prayer, humbly ask for His protection. He has given us escorts to help us here on the way and the journey. If we keep faith and a good conscience God will keep our footsteps on the road of life and our priorities will remain in the correct order.

Our Heavenly Father did not mean for His children to hide themselves away, but to spread that good message to all who may wish to hear. The Kingdom of God is not like some exclusive club that offers membership to some but not others. Associating with those on the outside in school, at work, and so on is acceptable. We can treat the people we see each day decently and with respect. We can all do our part in the mission work of the Kingdom. It is not easy to confess one's faith. It is no easier for us older ones than it is for you younger travel friends. But how important it is that we would do so. None of us know who may be seeking true peace. Who can say but that even one that would ridicule and make fun of a believer may be the one who has a restless conscience. There are many among us today, and I include myself in this group, who would never have known of God's Kingdom if it had not been revealed to them by believing friends. Not only through being spoken to, but also by seeing how believers live.

Jesus gave good instruction concerning this: *"Neither do men light a candle, and put it under a bushel, but on a candlestick; and it giveth light unto all that are in the house. "* (Matt. 5: 15)

Also, the Apostle wrote to the Corinthians *"We having the same spirit of faith, according as it is written, I believed, and therefore have I spoken; we also believe, and therefore speak. "* (2 Cor. 4: 13)

Think of all those from many areas of the world who have received the gift of living faith. Who could have ever imagined the things we have seen in this last short time? There is good reason to continue doing the work of the Kingdom while it is yet day and the grace doors remain open.

Jesus said: *"I must work the works of him that sent me, while it is day: the night cometh, when no man can work. "* (John 9: 4)

The above words of Jesus are such a good example for us. No one knows how much longer the grace doors will remain open. God yet calls, gathers and enlightens. Today He yet does His work through His children. Confessing our faith is so important.

The Fellowship of the Saints

God's Kingdom is made up of pardoned sinners. We share those things that are most important in life. We are united in that goal to reach Heaven's home. We care for one another as we travel this narrow road of life. Does it seem strange to think that a host of poor and unworthy sinners could be called the fellowship of the saints? Remember child of God that our Father in heaven sees us through His Son. When we have our sins forgiven God see us as holy and unblemished and completely acceptable unto Him. In this fellowship of saints we are encouraged to remain steadfast until we are called from this life to eternity that awaits all people. How can we do this?

A brother in faith who has long ago received his reward put it so simply and precious: "True standing fast is that we brothers and sisters await and are ready at every moment. This manner of waiting is possible only in the Lord. When we believe, momentarily, in child-like faith, that our weaknesses are forgiven in His blood; and also trust momentarily that the Lord has redeemed us on the cross – then we are fit for heaven. God sees us as holy and unblemished through His Son. We are then prepared for the wedding of the Lamb, may that call come at any wink of the eye,

even at this moment! We stand, travel friends, departure ready in the Lord. We know not when the scythe of death severs our lifeline, also we cannot foretell when the eastern sky flashes with the lighting of the Son of Man, and the cry is heard: The Bridegroom cometh, go forth to meet him!"

David Anderson

References:

The Bible

The Voice of Zion

He entrusted us with the Word of Reconciliation - Waino Havas

Christian Doctrine - Bible Reference Materials

He Who Hath an Ear, Let Him Hear - Heikki Kankkonen

Additional input received from Duane Pirness

If possible, have certain individuals speak briefly on the following issues during the discussion period:

- Why do some members of God's Kingdom lose the gift of faith? God's Word encourages us unto watchfulness in these matters.
- Specific examples of how heresies are different from God's kingdom.
- Specific examples of sins believers can be led into by associating with heretics and unbelievers. (Participating in competitive sports and attending sporting events or watching them on T.V., evil music, video use, T.V., theater going, etc.) Things like bowling and fishing and hunting on Sundays and how some have begun to question previous positions in Christianity about these matters.
- Personal experiences / recollections of the cause of the last heresy would be good. One caution in this regard: Frame the experiences in such a way that they are not unintentionally glamorized. Sometimes youth can be impressed in a wrong way about the things their parents did.
- How can we help unbelievers to understand that God's call unto his Kingdom is for all?
- What might be some experiences that unbelievers might have had that would have given them a negative impression of believers? What can we do to ensure that negative impressions are not being consciously or unconsciously given?
- Unbelievers looking negatively at believers for the underage smoking that is taking place.
- Worldly dress and hairstyles.