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THY KINGDOM COME

Sermon preached before the Southern Baptist Convention at Jacksonville, Florida, evening session, May 17, 1911, by Charles Spurgeon Gardner, D.D.

"Why call ye me Lord, Lord, and do not the things which I say."
Luke 6:46.

The Kingdom of God is a concept or ideal which no single age has adequately understood. But the enlarging experience of the human race reveals new depths of riches in it. I do not now undertake to give an exhaustive analysis of it, nor do I profess to comprehend it in all the wealth of its implications. But there are certain phases of its meaning, answering to the needs of our present-day life, which I wish to emphasize.

In its essential characteristic, it is an ideal system of personal relationships centering in the Supreme Person, God. One cannot read the words of Jesus without being impressed with the fact that the one significant thing in this universe to him is personality, and its realization in the relation of persons to one another. All else is secondary, mere foil. The one enterprize of God is the building up of an ideal system of relations between men, perfected in and through their relations to God; or to reverse the statement, the establishment of perfect relations between men and God, which relations are manifested and realized in ideal relations between men. The real business of God

is not the building of a material universe, magnificent as that is. Plants, animals, rivers, plains and hills, seas and continents, planets and suns, all related in a vast complex of physical and biological laws, are glorious to contemplate, and body forth with more or less adequacy the richness of his thought and the vastness of his power. But that is all secondary, preparatory, mere scaffolding for the real structure which God is erecting--a divine-human organization of persons--before the glory of which the wonders of the material universe become mere commonplaces and platitudes.

The principle of this divine-human organization of persons is love. It is sometimes said that what men hunger for in their relations with one another is not love, but justice and righteousness; but it should be remembered that genuine righteousness, positive righteousness, is only the practice of love--love embodied in the more fleeting and flexible, as well as the more permanent and fixed relations of life--the love of one's neighbor as one's self, perfected in their common loving loyalty to God, who is the central person in this system of righteousness. To organize this divine system of personal relationships was the mission of Jesus Christ in this world. For this he taught: for this he lived: for this he died. For this he ever lives again. For this his followers labor and toil and spend their lives. This is the divine enterprise. Its fulfillment is the goal of the whole creative process which started when the original chaos of matter began, under the impulse of the spirit of God, its development into a Cosmos; and will end only when the chaos of the moral universe shall, through the energy of the same Spirit, evolve into a Cosmos of which the wondrous material

order is but a feeble prototype. This divine ideal is involved in each of the great fundamental doctrines of our faith. This is the ultimate meaning of revelation, of the incarnation, of the atonement, of regeneration.

Wherever, then, the relations of men to God are not right, wherever the relations of men to men are not right, there is a task for the Kingdom. There we should be working for the Kingdom to come; and this divine ideal should be our guide in our efforts for righteous adjustment in all the relations in which men stand.

First among the instrumentalities for its realization is the church. This is the characteristic instrument created especially for the task of building the Kingdom. Two dangerous errors are to be guarded against here. One is that the church, the specific religious institution, is not needed: that the Kingdom of God, as a detached and floating ideal, a formless, unembodied spirit, without hands or feet or tongue, could make its way in and conquer the world. A churchless Christianity could never have won a hearing from the reluctant ears of men, not brought their rebellious hearts to capitulation, nor uprooted false ideas and codes, nor destroyed social institutions which were hoary with age and fortified with material power. For such tasks the Kingdom needed an effective instrument, and that instrument was, and still is an ecclesiastical organization.

A second error is that the church is identical with the Kingdom. This is the principle of the Roman perversion of religion. There is ever present in human nature a tendency to attach to the means the value which belongs only to the end. And whenever this takes place, the

real end is lost sight of and there results a ruinous inversion of values. The means, having absorbed the value of the end, is no longer instrumental to that end, but becomes the most effective obstruction of it. And so the ecclesiastical organization, when it becomes an end in itself, obstructs the progress of the Kingdom.

In addition to the church, the Kingdom, as it progresses, creates other collateral and subsidiary organs. Many forms of healthful activity for the uplift of men spring up and prove to be more or less efficient as instruments for the realization of the broad purpose of Jesus Christ. Moreover, as the Kingdom grows, it pervades the whole life of man, penetrates and dominates, uses more and more the functions and organs of individual and collective life. As the process goes on, all forms of activity, all institutions, fall gradually under the sway of the King, do their work more and more in his spirit and become instrumental in building up the Kingdom. It is like the spread of a conflagration. The church is the lighted torch that starts the fire here and there and yonder. But as one great structure after another is wrapped in flames, it becomes a center of propagation and flings its sparks upon the disseminating winds. But this is a figure of destruction. The church is perhaps more like a spiritual battery which maintains itself distinct from other institutions, but charges them with its ideals, and they thus become centers of moral energy and radiate ethical and spiritual power. They are first mastered by the Kingdom, and then used, each according to its own nature and function, as instruments for its propagation.

Broadly speaking, there are two methods by which the Kingdom grows.

The first is evangelization, the bringing of men into the Kingdom. The first step is, of necessity, to bring men into allegiance to the King: to naturalize them, so to speak, as his subjects. Or, if we think of the process in educational terms, as Jesus seemed to be doing when he gave the great commission, men must first be enrolled in the school of Christ, made disciples, before the process of instruction can proceed. In fact, the evangelizing process and the educational process cannot be disconnected without disaster, and yet the two are distinct. Instruction and training must precede that great hour when the individual will, having been enlightened as to its fundamental obligations to God and men, reaches, through the operation of the divine Spirit, a personal decision to obey God and live for others. Instruction and training may make that decision increasingly certain and easy; but in the last analysis it is the act of the personal will assuming voluntarily the filial attitude toward men, which constitutes a man a member of this divinely organized system of ethical life which Jesus is building up in the world. But this act of the personal will, which is the specific thing aimed at in evangelization in the narrower sense of the word, does not put an end to the educational process. It is the terminal point of one stage in that process, but the beginning point of another and much longer stage. The soul must be led on to ever broader and deeper conceptions of the will of God and its application to all the manifold life of men in the world. Thus, evangelization, in the larger and truer sense of the word, includes the educational process; and this is a process of dealing with individual minds and hearts and wills. This work upon the individual is the initial step in the building of the Kingdom.

But if we call it the first step, it is because there is a second;

namely, the reorganization of society, and whatever may be one's conception of the relation of the individual to society it certainly is true that in any deliberate, systematic attempt to reorganize social ideals and social institutions one must begin upon individuals. Indeed, we are safe in asserting with all possible assurance that the individual is the point of emphasis, of acute accent, in the whole scheme of Jesus. Individuals alone have souls. Only in the individual is consciousness found. In the last analysis, pleasure and pain, good and evil, salvation and perdition, are terms that have meaning for the individual consciousness alone. Apart from the individual consciousness, society is merely an abstraction. Apart from the individual consciousness, an institution cannot be happy or miserable, cannot perceive and appreciate the difference between right and wrong, cannot have ideals, cannot be saved or lost, cannot have any experience at all. The individual is the unit of value in the divine scheme of life. What are called social values, social realities of any kind, have meaning only as they are registered in the consciousness of individuals. But nobody has ever realized more distinctly and intensely than our Lord that you cannot deal intelligently and effectively with the individual without respect to the social group and the social order of which he is a member, and it is perfectly patent to the open-minded student of his teaching and life that his plan includes in its scope both the regeneration of the individual and the transformation of the social order.

One enters the Kingdom when he accepts Jesus as Lord. But is that all? Is the matter settled by the simple acknowledgment of the

Lordship of Jesus? With something of fine scorn he says: "Why call ye me Lord, Lord, and do not the things which I say?" It is not the unctuous declaration of his Lordship for which he is concerned. He is not interested in titles. Least of all is he ambitious to wear them and exploit them. How pitifully inadequate are our verbal ascriptions of honor! What he seeks for is something far more real; namely, to get certain things done, to have his followers actually do the will of God and do it in all their human relations, to embody the principle of righteousness--the practice of love--in all their lives; and this leads straight and inevitably to the reorganization of human society. The evangelization which does not become social transformation is abortive, because it amounts to nothing more than the multiplication of those who say "Lord, Lord" and do not the things which he says.

Nor is it the theoretical demonstration of his Lordship for which he is solicitous. I am far from disparaging the efforts of those who are giving energy and thought to the vindication of the Lordship of Jesus on theological grounds. There is no question but that modern philosophy has made necessary such a defence of our historic Christology. But as I see it, the fundamental need today is not the vindication of the position of Jesus in a metaphysical conception of the universe. It is rather the practical vindication of his supremacy in the sphere of human conduct, in the realm of social relations. It is not the shouting of "Lord, Lord," either in the tones of pious rhapsody or in the learned terminology of the schools, but it is the doing of what he says in all the spheres and relationships of life. A recent writer of great influence, after discussing pro and con the

moral and social influences of historic Christianity, remarks:

"If however, we take the Christian teaching, apart from all inadequacies of historic application, as a statement on an ethical ideal, and seek to measure its value as an ideal, a more decisive judgment is possible. It carries one side of ethics to the highest possible pitch of perfection, but leaves another side comparatively neglected. The conception of a brotherhood of love based on the negation of self is demonstrably inadequate to the problem of reorganizing society and intelligently directing human affairs."

I quote this only to ask, will Christian people accept this verdict? For one, I reject it absolutely. It is based upon a strange misconception of the fundamental ethical principles of Christianity, and so reaches a conclusion that strips Christianity of all right to speak with authority on the vital problems of life today. It dethrones Jesus within that very realm in which he is supremely jealous of his Kingship. But if we refuse to see, or are too timid to assert the plain social implications of our religion; if we are lacking in the spiritual nerve to make a bold and unflinching application of the principles of the Kingdom of God to the spheres of politics and economics, we thereby accept this degrading verdict upon our religion, and stand by consenting while the crown is taken from the brow of Jesus Christ. Nor can we avert the deep disgrace of this treasonable acquiescence by making more vociferous our cries of "Lord, Lord."

We are living a highly differentiated life today. Our activities are divided up into pretty clearly distinguished segments. The same person is a domestic man, a political man, an economic man, a

religious man, etc. Each of these main sections of his life is subdivided into an indefinite number of smaller sections. The same person may be classified under a hundred different heads. Long division alone applies to our practical relations today; and many men are trying to live according to one standard in one section of their lives and other standards in other sections. A writer of deep insight into the ethical problems of our time says:

"All that can be said from the standpoint of the moral subject is that he is conscious of loyalty to a number of laws, which have their bases in as many ideals; it is farthest from his experience to have codified these laws, or to have grouped the ideas under a comprehensive and dominating ideal."

This is a profound truth. Hence you see the double standard or rather multiple standard of conduct in many lives. The situation affords an ample opportunity to ease our conscience by cutting out great sections of life and setting them aside as spheres in which religion is not expected to operate; in which the ethics of Jesus do not apply; which are not included within the scope of the Kingdom of God. And when men begin this practice of excluding sections of life from the scope of the Kingdom it is noticeable that they always exclude from the religious jurisdiction those activities in which they are most deeply and practically interested, which absorb the greater portion of their time and energy. Over the continents of life they unfurl the flag of the secular--a vast domain which is to be governed by the ancient law of "Every man for himself"; a law copied from the brute world and prevalent among beasts of the forest, but dignified as the vital principle of economic and political life. On a few

detached and rocky islands, situated in the stormy seas, they erect the flag of religion. They even consent that the whole of that heavenly world, about which they have no very distinct ideas except that no millions are there to be won, and no political offices and plunder are for sale, may be turned over to the practice of the principles of Christ.

The greatest of all heresies is this practice of running an imaginary line across life and placing its divisions under different sovereignties. We are told that religion has no authority to speak on the economic and political problems that are shaking our social order down to its foundations; that the proper sphere for its sway lies elsewhere. But if we accept such a superficial and arbitrary splitting of our lives into unrelated fractions and withdraw to the side of life which is technically called religious, the problem only takes a different form and attacks us in our fancied seclusion. For those same economic and political difficulties project their disturbing influences across the line into the sphere reserved for religion and play havoc with the spiritual power and efficiency and peace of the churches. It is not a religious matter, we are told. But nevertheless the economic and political evils of our time are sweeping great masses of the people out of the churches, and alienating from organized religion the very elements of the population which flocked around Jesus and responded to his gracious words. It is not a religious problem, we are told. But it is sundering in twain the very body of Christ! We cannot escape its spiritual effects by withdrawing across an imaginary line.

A few weeks ago a number of United States citizens in a Texas border-town were slain by bullets fired by opposing forces of Mexicans just across the line. Shall we say it was not the business of the United States? It is the privilege of the Mexicans, of course, to shoot at each other without dictation from this Government. Maybe it was none of our business, but the bullets were falling on our side and killing our people, and we made it our business. The same situation has arisen with regard to the church and the secular problems of today. What the whole world needs is to wake up to the religious, the spiritual significance of economic and political activities. When Jesus Christ lays hold of a soul he grasps the very center of the personality. He seizes the man way down in the fundamental unity of his life, below all these superficial distinctions in the spheres of his action, and one part of his life does not belong to the Lord more than another.

But maybe the effort is made to set apart a specific religious sphere in life by applying another principle of division. A man's life is made up on the one hand of simple personal, individual contacts and relations with his fellows; and, on the other hand, of corporate, institutional relations. In the one set of relations his life is not organized. He is just a man among his fellows. In the other his life is organized as the part of a system. He is dove-tailed into a great more or less rigid social order. On the one side is free personal life; on the other is institutional life, in which he is not free. Now, there is a tendency to regard the principles of Christianity as applicable only in the sphere of free personal relations. There are many men who live by different standards in these departments

of action. They will do things as members of a corporation or institution which they would by no means consent to do as individual men dealing with their fellows. Institutional or corporate action is not subject to the law of Christ. According to this view, corporations have no souls. Institutions are non-moral entities; they are not included in the scope of the Kingdom of God.

Away with such abstract subterfuges! A corporation has as many souls as there are individuals in the corporation. The extension of the dominion of the Kingdom of God over these corporations is one of the great religious tasks of our time. An institution or a corporation which is dominated by evil ideal, or in which is embodied an evil principle, is one of the greatest possible agencies for the spiritual ruin of men. It is hard enough to deal with sin when it lies in the heart of an individual man; but when sin is organized into an institution or corporation, it obtains respectability; it is fortified, bold, defiant. Being built into the social structure it is inter-related with the whole organization of life, and thus acquires not only prestige in the eyes of men, and power over individual hearts, but is inaccessible to moral suasion, and when attacked can rally to its support the whole social system of which the institution in which it is embodied forms a part. To attack it means necessarily to disturb in some measure the equilibrium of the general fabric of society. For this reason, sin that is organized into the social system, when an attempt is made to dislodge it, often calls to its support the conservative instincts of good men. It thus acquires power to create division in the army of Jesus Christ. It gets to

be related in some way with the interests of so many men who by personal inclination would be opposed to it, that it spreads moral paralysis in every direction, lowers ideals, quenches the spirit in the souls of multitudes, spreads worldiness in the churches, and relaxes the springs of evangelistic zeal. If the so-called secular organizations of society--that is, economic corporations and political institutions--are to remain, as they have been from immemorial times, under the sway of selfish principles and materialistic ideals; if the Kingdom of God is never to overflow them, penetrate them, assimilate them and set ethical and spiritual ideals in their very heart, then no intelligent and honest eye can see anything but lowering clouds on the horizon of the future. If the church of Jesus Christ, when brought face to face with the issue, quails before the task of assailing evil when it is found incorporated in the very structure of society and dominant in the economic and political methods in vogue, we may expect the sad wail to grow louder that the church in the great centers of population holds with ever feeblar grasp a dwindling group of adherents.

A thoughtful mind can hardly fail to bring into relation with one another certain incidents which have crowded themselves upon the public attention in recent weeks. One is a judicial decision rendered by the Supreme Court of our greatest State in a case which, in its naked principle, involved the relative sacredness of property and human life: and the Court declared that the sacredness of property was fundamental in the political constitution of our country. Another is the action of the Senate of the United States, in which a majority

of the Senators covered that once respectable organ of government with infamy and the nation with shame, by voting to receive into their official comradeship a man who owed his election to a grossness and baseness of political corruption which all but prostrates decent men with moral nausea. And while the civilized world was standing aghast at this manifestation of the deadly virus at work in the veins of our political and economic organism, our hearts were almost frozen by the alleged revelation of a vast dynamiting conspiracy on the part of conspicuous labor leaders. Are not all these incidents vitally related? The most convincing evidence of the truth of such a conspiracy yet forthcoming, is that it fits so logically into the situation; seems the natural and inevitable companion picture to the other two. The fundamental sacredness of property rights as against human life; the unblinking effort of corporations, by purchasing public servants, to control the policy of the Government in their own behalf; the desperate determination of maddened laborers to offset the anarchy of the bribe with the anarchy of the bomb--are they not all of a piece? And have these things no intimate relation to the religious problems of our time? The fundamental trouble is that an anti-Christian principles lies at the basis of economic and political enterprises. It is sin organized into the most substantial parts of the social fabric, and God is calling us in this day to fight for the eradication of that sin; so that instead of self-seeking materialism and the greed of gain, the law of service shall be made the organic principle of our economic and political life.

The concrete question is this: Can the occupations of the business man and the politician be converted from means of getting gain

into forms of public service? Why should they not? The law of the Kingdom of God is service. Do not business and politics rightfully come under that law? It is not, primarily, a question of consecrating the wealth that is found in a man's hand. Back of that lies a deeper and more vital question. Was the method by which that wealth came into his hands consecrated? Ought it ever to have been in his hands? If the method by which it came into his hands was not righteous, if it came not in fact by the service of his fellow man and his God, rather than the service of self, then no dedication of a fraction of it to charitable purposes can square his account with the world and with God. To speak of converting business enterprises and politics from means of getting gain into forms of unselfish service strikes some ears as the weak twaddle of an idealist who is without ideas. Such ideal dreams are wrecked at once upon that robust dictum of common sense, "You can't reconstruct human nature." But, I ask, is not Christianity a method of reconstructing human nature. Has it not been proclaimed and accepted for two milleniums that the reconstruction of human nature is exactly what Christianity is in this world for? Now, if in this twentieth century, when we stand facing the task of applying that principle in the real business of life, we are going to run up the white flag and say you cannot change human nature, then, in the name of the God of Veracity, let us be done with this age-long farce! The most unpardonable treason to Jesus Christ of which a man can be guilty is to say that he cannot change human nature and bring it from the service of self into the service of God and one's fellows. He can! He has done it. No man is his follower in whom that change has not

been wrought. No man is his disciple who works for his own profit six days in the week and then pretends to live for God and his fellow man on the seventh. No man has a right to wear his name who dedicates to religion the ill-gotten gain that really belongs to others. No man is a Christian who reserves nine-tenths of his wealth for the pampering of his own body and the bodies of his children, and (God save mark!) "give" the other tenth to God. It is a sacreligious sham to denominate as Christian a society whose economic and political ideals and methods are in antithesis to the law of the Kingdom. If I have one fault to find with the evangelism of our day, it is that it does not set the plowshare deep enough. This field needs sub-soiling. The multiplication of nominal Christians will not avail. If human nature is reconstructed according to the program of our King it must, and will, show itself in the reconstruction of the ideals and methods of our organized social life. The question is not salvation by civilization, but the salvation of civilization.

Yes, to bring this vast, organized life of our times under the sway of the Kingdom is, perhaps, the most stupendous task of our day. There is but one other task comparable to it in magnitude, difficulty and urgency; and that is the evangelization of the non-Christian peoples of the earth. With a strange suddenness, it seems to me, the Christian hosts have been brought before two tasks which are great enough to thrill even the most sluggish heart, and great enough to intimidate any but heroic hearts--the propagation of the Gospel of the Kingdom to the limits of the world, and the realization of the social implications of the Kingdom at home. And these two tasks are closely related to each other. For, if Christianity should break down on the

social side at home, the evangelistic campaign abroad would be correspondingly weakened. Those Orientals are engaged in the study of comparative religion on a colossal scale and by a practical method. In reponse to our missionary enterprise they are sending their ablest men to study our religion on its own ground. And with more open-mindedness than we could have expected, are investigating its ethical and social effects among the people who ask them to receive it. Now, in the light of such investigation, what appearance does our so-called Christian civilization make? What a humiliating indictment, for instance, do our city slums and city governments constitute? The City is rightly called the center of our civilization. Now usually, if not always, you find somewhere near the center of this center, and corresponding to the size of the city, an area consecrated to the heathen gods of vice. So absolutely is that area given over to the worship of Bacchus and Venus that you rarely find a Christian man who dares to challenge their supremacy in the name of Jesus Christ. Respectable homes fly from this district, and the churches follow in the flight. Through its terrible vortex unnumbered thousands are sucked down to the lowest hell. But why is it there? It seems to accompany the city as inevitably as a man's shadow accompanies his body when he walks in the sunshine, and its presence debauches the entire life of the city and gives tone to its government. Manifestly it is a symptom, and a symptom of a constitutional disease. It is a cancerous sore that has for its origin a poison in the blood. We may apply local treatment and local treatment is far better than no treatment at all, but constitutional treatment alone will reach the cause.

The existence of this phenomenon is an advertisement to the whole world either that our Christianity is unequal to the task of social redemption, or that its remedial power has never been thoroughly applied. You and I accept the latter explanation, but the former is more likely to be the explanation given by our heathen investigators. We are accustomed to judge their religion by their social life, and it is hard for us to refuse to apply the same test to our religion which we insist on applying to theirs.

Verily in this vast cosmopolitan life of modern times, into which as a crucible all religions are poured to be tested, the effort to propagate Christianity in heathen lands reacts as a challenge to put it to the final test in a full application to our own social life. With every extension of the radius of Christian propagandism there must a corresponding increase of intensity in the process of evangelization and social transformation at the propagating centers. The further you are to send the arrow, the more tense must be the bow. That religion alone can make an effective appeal to the whole world which can demonstrate its power to create a new world. The men who are working for the evangelization of our home population and the reorganization of our social life to conform to the ideals of the Kingdom are doing basal work for foreign missions, and the foreign missionary is sending back upon us a most heathful and stimulating reaction from his distant post.

In conclusion, let me emphasize the fact that the Kingdom is actually coming. We mis-read the signs of the times, and mis-conceive the meaning of our religion if we give way one moment to despondency. The

whole situation is toned with encouragement. Evil is rampant, but when was it not? If it seems blacker than ever it is because we view it against the background of a brighter ideal. An exhilarating fact is that so many people perceive its monstrosity. Evil is never so vicious as when fighting with its back to the wall. Defensive fighting is always the most desperate and the most hopeless. The earth seems filled with confusion, but confusion is in the inevitable incident of transition, and there must be transition if there is to be a better world. Someone has said "it is not a crisis but a synthesis of crises." In the cracks and fissures which are everywhere appearing in what seemed to the solid stratum of our organized society I see only the multiplying demonstrations that selfishness as organizing principle of social life is a manifest failure. For ages men have declared that the organization of life in this world on the principles of the Kingdom of God was impracticable, and have asserted it with such assurance that even the children of the Kingdom have themselves been convinced of its truth. But lo! as society develops in the providence of God we see that the old anti-Christian principle of social organization is showing its adequacy under the fearful strains and stresses of modern life. And multitudes see that it is folly to rest the ever increasing weight of the social structure upon a foundation of materialistic self-seeking, and are anxiously looking about for a better organic principle. They will discover it when their eyes are open to see the meaning of the Kingdom of God. The inauguration of every new dispensation in the providence of God has been preceded by a period of confusion and disintegration due to

the failure and collapse of some old, inadequate basis of social adjustment. Is not this the explanation of the present world situation?

It seems to me that we are approaching the close of one and the opening of another great state in the development of the Kingdom of God. The heavy clouds upon the horizon conceal but for a time---nay! they are already breaking up and disclosing through their rifts the unparalleled splendors of a new day in the world's history. If I have any grave apprehensions as to the present situation, it is that our churches, the forces of organized religion, have not a sufficient outlook, a sufficiently broad comprehension of the opportunities and tasks that confront them. It is no time for "tithing mint, anise and cummin." It will be very hard for those servants who are not ready for their Lord at his coming. Surely the successive tremors and vibrations which are felt throughout our world today are only the rumble of the heavy wheels of his chariot as our King is drawing near to his coronation.