

## THE KINGDOM

Annual Convention Sermon, by Dr. John W. Phillips, Mobile, Alabama, preached at the Southern Baptist Convention, Birmingham, Alabama, May 13, 1931.

Text: And Jesus went about all Galilee teaching in their synagogues, and preaching the gospel of the kingdom" (Matt. 4:23).

Jesus purposed a church and a kingdom. In origine, therefore, both are divine. But not all divine things are of equal importance. "One star differs from another star in glory."

If the relative importance of the church and kingdom can be determined by scanning the concordance, we find that Jesus mentioned the church on only two separate occasions but many times spoke of the kingdom. His sermons were about the kingdom. His parables were parables of the kingdom. He prayed for the coming of the kingdom. And so wonderful and winsome were his informal table-talks concerning the kingdom that a fellow-guest in Simon's house involuntarily exclaimed "Blessed is he who shall eat bread in the kingdom of God." The kingdom was the master passion of Christ's soul. For this he lived, labored, loved and died. And to the consummation of this holy purpose he commissioned his church.

### CHURCHES COME EASIER THAN KINGDOMS

Churches can be organized and their membership increased by about the same methods, and from similar motives, as clubs, lodges, and political parties. They can be "run on strictly business principles by practical business men." But the kingdom of heaven predicates a supernatural achievement of spiritual motives, spiritual methods, and spiritual power. One may be the product of a standardized mechanism. The other grows from an inward life like seed sown in the gound.

It is easier to get into the church than into the kingdom, and much easier after you are in. A profession of faith and submission to an ordinance will admit any man to a church. The requirements of the kingdom are far more exacting. In the church we can sit and sing our souls away to everlasting bliss. In kingdom we cannot. In the church we can "glory in the cross" by decorating it with our verbal garlands and gems of emotional oratory, but kingdom people deny themselves, carry crosses, and literally follow the footprints of a selfless Christ.

It is easy for a purse proud man to enter the church and become a "leading member" but Jesus recognized the tremendous difficulty of getting the same man into the kingdom of heaven. The rich young ruler was in the church, but refused the terms of the kingdom.

Nicodemus was a member in good and regular standing of the same church as Jesus; but so limited were his mental outlooks; so circumscribed his sympathies, so intolerant his spirit, that he must need be born again before he could understand what Jesus was talking about, before he could see what the kingdom of God is. Churchmen can be as parochial and exclusive as were the Pharisees, but kingdom men must be all-inclusive as the uttermost reach of the finger tips of God's love.

The righteousness of the Scribes and Pharisees makes very acceptable church members, but as it is not written, "Except your righteousness shall exceed the righteousness of the Scribes and Pharisees you can in no case enter the kingdom of heaven."

#### OLD TESTAMENT TYPES

The Old Testament Scriptures record these two types of religion. One fostered by the church, the other demanded by the kingdom. The

religion of the priest, and that of the prophet. A religion of magic, and a religion of moral repentances spiritual regenerations and ethical values.

The antagonisms are everywhere apparent. While the priest devised an elaborate and expensive ritual for the ceremonial cleansing of defiled places, furniture, clothing and bodies, the prophet called upon the people to purify their hearts, forsake their sins and mend their ways.

When the prophet tarried amid the solemn silences of the mountain to learn the will of Jehovah, and discern something of his glory, his brother the priest, made a calf of gold and called it a god. The priest was never a mountain man. On the Mount of Transfiguration were three prophets, but no priests. The priest dwelt in the valley of delusions, amid the ghostly forms of ancient superstitions, where the smoke of his altars obscured the growing light, and tradition condemned Truth to the scaffold and the cross.

The priest claimed divine authority for his animal sacrifices but with united voice the prophets denied the claim, asserting that these sacrificial rights were a relic of paganism, an abomination to Jehovah who hated and despised them. In their indignation they exclaimed, "To slay a lamb is no better than to cut a dog's throat." And when they sang they said, "Sacrifice and offering thou hast not desired; the sacrifices of God are a broken spirit and a contrite heart."

The priest confined God in a box, over which he presided, and from which he doled divine favors, for a consideration to Jews only. The prophet took the wings of the morning and found God everywhere. He saw him in the stars, heard him in the storms, walked with him in the gardens and talked with him in solitary places. He saw him as the one God of the whole earth, and dreamed of a spiritual kingdom which should include all mankind. He sometimes wove his visions into great

stories, depicting Jehovah as an inter-racial God whose providence extended to Job the Arabian, to Ruth the Moabitess, and was a considerate of Ninevah as Jerusalem.

The priest was the fawning of favorite kings. The prophet, like an avenging angel, chased king's chariots and hurled alarming denunciations into royal ears.

By an amazing system of taboos, the priests gathered a tenth of all the increase of the land, the first fruits and the best, and thus secured an endless supply of meat, meal, fruit, oil and wine, which they first waived before their altars and then ate for their dinners. But the prophets, the men of the kingdom who wrought righteousness, lived on locusts and wild honey with an occasional barley cake baked by a widow. They were stoned, they were sawn asunder, they were slain with the sword. "O, Jerusalem, Jerusalem, thou killest the prophets which are sent unto thee."

#### JESUS AND HIS KINGDOM

The Jewish church defeated the kingdom, and for four hundred years not a prophet appeared in Israel. Then came the startling announcement of the wilderness man, "Repent, the kingdom of heaven is at hand," and soon the prophet of Nazareth was going through all Galilee, preaching the gospel of the kingdom.

And what a prophet. Far exceeding the superman of Isaiah's visions and the Messiah of Israel's hopes. God's beloved Son. Man's Redeemer and Lord. Pathos and power, meekness and majesty, earth and heaven, humanity and divinity so exquisitely blended in that unmatched personality that men first said of him, Jesus Christ is a man who walks with God, but when later they say his glory, the glory as of the only begotten of the Father, they exclaimed Jesus Christ was God walking with men.

"He preached the gospel of the kingdom. By sermon and parable he ~~exclaim~~ proclaimed it to the churchmen of his day expecting them to share his enthusiasm and follow him. He told them the time was propitious, all things were ready and bade them enter. But because the principles of the kingdom jeopardized their special privileges, antagonized their prejudices, opposed their orthodoxes, "they all with one accord began to make excuses." They would not enter themselves and did their uttermost to prevent others. But there must be a kingdom of God, so go out into the byways and hedges and collect the unrecognized. Out of them I will form my church and create the kingdom. They shall be kingdom of the "Blessed," the pure in heart, the peacemakers, those who hunger and thirst after righteousness, those who return good for evil, through whom I can enlighten and save the world. My people have rejected the kingdom, but go ye into all the world and preach this gospel to every creature.

#### THE EARLY CHURCH AND THE KINGDOM

While their Master was with them the disciples went everywhere preaching the gospel of the kingdom. But they seem never to have seen it as he saw it, and very soon it faded from their sky, until the word almost disappeared from their writings. Retaining some of the elements of the kingdom, the church became supreme. Proclaiming the crucified Redeemer as the risen and ascended Lord and living much of the kingdom life she had some glorious years. She won converts, made saints, and martyrs, penetrated society, invaded governments turned the world upside down—and became the victim of her own success. For, when in the second century the devil took her into an exceeding high mountain and showed her all the kingdoms of the world and said, "All this will I give thee if thou wilt fall down and worship me," the church accepted the terms

and traded her spiritual birthright for material advantage. Her Master rejected the sword and took the cup. She rejected the cup and took the sword. The boast has been made that the church conquered the world. Alas, the world conquered the church. Christ's spirit, methods and program were repudiated or modified; and so far as organized Christianity ~~was~~ <sup>was</sup> concerned his gospel of the kingdom was driven from the earth. His spiritual brotherhood founded on love became an exclusive and centralized ecclesiastical system, administered from a throne. His simple teachings did not satisfy the intellectual pride of a secularized church, support her pretensions, or fit into her ostentatious observances so she took pagan superstitions, Greek philosophies, oriental mysticisms, with some elements of Christianity and wove them into her theologies and rituals. In other words, the kingdom of the Beatitudes was displaced by an unscriptural, external kingdom of physical power and material glory.

#### THE CHURCH OF TODAY AND THE KINGDOM

The time at my disposal does not permit a review of subsequent church history. Much of it is written in blood, besmeared with crime, satanic in its plots, intrigues persecutions and wars. But here is the suggestive fact, the idea of the kingdom was never wholly destroyed. By a few great souls, it was preserved alive, and emerges now as the supreme challenge of our day. More people are thinking, writing and talking about the kingdom than ever before. It is the biggest thing in the Christian thought of the world. If reports are true the outstanding event in the religious life of Japan is the "Kingdom Movement" led by Mr. Kagawa, a Christian convert. He started out, as he said, "to win a million souls to Christ that out of them he might create a body of Jesus-minded people sufficiently large to begin the practical work of bringing in the kingdom of God in Japan." And by the kingdom, he

means, "the application of what Jesus was and taught to the social, economic and political life of the nation."

What of the Christian forces of America? Are we ready to adopt the entire program of Jesus, make his objective ours, and start a holy crusade for the kingdom of God? The god of things as they are has had his day. His achievements were colossal. He multiplied wealth until figures lost their meaning. He created a material civilization of undreamed splendor. Science served him with her marvelous inventions and discoveries. A self-seeking political economy was his prime minister, competition his system, and greed his driving power. Boastingly, he exclaimed, "Is not this great Babylon which I have built by the might of my power, for the glory of my majesty"? But at the crack of a pistol in an obscure Balkan State the storm gathered which beat upon that house and it fell, as we who live amid its ruins have heard the call for reconstruction. On us is laid the responsibility of building a new world. But, on what lines, out of the material, on what foundation? To repeat the follies of the past is to perpetuate its disasters.

Men high in statecraft and business, like the late President Wilson, Lloyd George, Bernard Shaw, Roger Babson, declare that Christ is the only hope of the political, economic and social world. The Manufacturers Record asserts that only the application of the business principles of Jesus can bring abiding prosperity, and the Wall Street Journal announced its conviction that it is either Christ or chaos. And come to think of it, the prophet of Nazareth said far more about human relationship than he did about anything else. Did he not warn against covetousness, against the over-much in the barn? And, as paradoxical as it may seem, is not our over-much the cause of our lack? During the past few

months the people have hungered because there was too much fuel. And have been penniless because there was too much money. Too much in the barns. Noting this tendency, Mr. Gladstone said that the task of the 20th century would be "to make men as good as their machinery is efficient," and Mr. Edison is reported to have said, "We ought to quit inventing until we learn to use wisely what we have." All of which emphasized the necessity of producing a better grade of Christians. Men and women, who obeying the Lordship of Christ have ceased to regard his Golden Rule as a pious gesture, and who really love their neighbors as themselves.

#### WE MUST BELIEVE IN THE KINGDOM

To become crusaders of the kingdom, we ourselves must believe it possible and practical. We must cease to regard the Sermon on the Mount as a galaxy of unattainable ideals; beautiful as rainbows, empty as dreams, and as illusive as the palm trees and fountains of a desert mirage. We must believe that Jesus knew the laws of the moral and spiritual universe far better than any scientist knows the physical laws of cause and effects, and that his laws of the kingdom reveal the only conditions by which God can savingly operate in the affairs of men. That he regarded them as the basic principles of eternal truth and unalterable righteousness, as self-operative as the laws of gravitation is fully attested by his closing declaration, "Build your houses on these sayings of mine, they will stand. Build them on anything else, they will fall."

#### AND PREACH THE LAWS OF THE KINGDOM

Then, like Jesus, we must preach the gospel of the kingdom. We must make it clear to our people that the church and the kingdom are not one and the same thing; and that the church exists for the sake of the kingdom. We must create a kingdom literature, sing kingdom hymns, offer kingdom prayers and provide our youth with test books

of the kingdom. "For Christ and his church" must be supplemented with "For Christ and his Kingdom." "The Doctrines of our Church" must be studied in connection with "The Doctrines of the Kingdom." We have done well in training our young people for church membership. Now let us do better by training them for kingdom service."

Then, too, we must restudy in the light of the kingdom, some of our great words and favorite phrases. What do we mean by the atonement, by salvation and redemption? What do we mean by "following Jesus" and "accepting him as our Saviour and Lord?" A brother excused himself from a citizens reform movement by saying, "It's my business to get people saved. I preach the gospel and leave these outside questions to others." What did he mean? Who are the saved? Who are others?

And what are the problems which lie outside the gospel of the kingdom? Paul said, "I determined to know nothing among you save Jesus Christ and him crucified." But reread his letters and you find that "Jesus Christ and him crucified" included personal character, and conduct domestic felicity, social concord, business honesty, civic righteousness, capital and labor, inter-religious and inter-racial relationships, every question of human welfare. There is nothign outside, Nothing beyond.

We honor the church and have no sympathy with the cheap sneers which are sometimes hurled at her ineffectiveness, or with a humanitarianism, which would ignore the church, the cross, and their Christ. We believe her to be the pillar and stay of the truth, the Christ-ordained agency for making a righteous world. We glory in the achievements which have followed her spiritual awakening. Through her millions of lives have been regenerated, and the great philanthropies instituted. She has ministered to the poor, the sick, the orphan, and the imprisoned. She has been

the good Samaritan to many a wounded traveler on the robber infested highway of life. Under her brooding heart the compassionate spirit of the modern world was born, expressing itself in our charitable and humane institutions. The blood stained cross of Calvary preceded and inspired the red cross of battlefields and other desolate place. Having accomplished so much, are we not ready for a forward movement? Is it not time that we rediscover and proclaim the long lost gospel of Christ? That we clear the highway of the robbers, and remove the causes of evil conditions? God deals with us as though we were intelligent. He will not save us from fevers as long as we neglect the sewers. The glory of modern medical science is its preventative measures, and the knowledge that every form of zymotic disease can be exterminated by the application of sanitary measures is no more certain than that every form of evil can be exterminated by the application of the gospel of Christ. He came to "destroy the world of the devil," to "save his people from sinning," to "take away the sins of the world," and does the present sinful world rebuke his presumption, or our failure to realize the greatness of his purpose and power.

While in England, where Baptists are comparatively few, I spoke before the East London Baptist Association, and was a bit boastful of the numerical preponderance of Southern Baptists. I told them that in Alabama and I though in Georgia, we outnumbered all of the other denominations. Later one of the ministers visited our Southland, admired many things, but was greatly puzzled by others. He asked some embarrassing questions about our attitude toward the negro, remarked on the crowded conditions of our jails and was surprised at the glaring violations of Constitutional law. After reading in one ~~our~~ <sup>of</sup> our newspapers that during the previous year there were more homicides in one Southern city than in the whole of Great Britain, he turned to me with the question, "Did you say

that numerically the Baptists hold the balance of power in the South?" My reply was "Yes." To which he retorted, "They why don't you use it?" If I had thought of it at the time, which I did not, I think the correct answer would have been: because we have not yet realized the magnitude of our task, and the power at our disposal. We have assumed the attitude that if we look after our local churches, God must look after his kingdom. And feeling no responsibility for the kingdom, we have not sought the kingdom spirit and power.

A better day is dawning. Many pastors and people are not far from the kingdom of God. We are beginning to see that the Christian church is not the offshoot of the Jewish church, but a new creation. The Baptist preachers are not successors of priests, but sons of the prophets. That the ceremonials and sacrifices, "which would never take away sin" are not the moulds into which our theologies should be cast. That God is holy and demands a righteous people. That God is strictly truthful and will not pronounce us righteous until we really are. That salvation is neither mystical nor magical, but the practical application of the principles of Christ and of Galilee and Calvary to the motives and methods of men.

#### A REVIVAL OF THE KINGDOM

If this Convention were asked to name the greatest need of our churches I am sure the answer would be a "revival." And by revival we mean something more than an unual protracted meeting, as good as that may be. We mean a mighty spiritual movement of repentance toward God and faith in Jesus Christ which would empower our churches and compel the attention of an indifferent world. Thank God we are not satisfied with things as they are. Our present type of Christianity is not impressive. We create no stir. Nobody pays us the compliment of being drunken or crazy. Satan may tremble when he sees the weakest

saint upon his knees, but nobody else does. In the calculations of evil minded men we are not considered. They hear us sing, "Like a Mighty Army Moves the Church of God," but remain defiant and unafraid. Corrupt politicians have no fear we shall bolt our party. No evil institution anticipates our united opposition. God help us to step up to the high challenge of Christ and surprise them. Faith may not be alarmed at the dangers which threaten our church and nation, but only stupidity can deny they exist. This is not time for blind partisanship in politics or exclusive denominationalism in religion. The need of our day is federation of practical Christian sympathy for the underprivileged, and a massing of Christly power against the forces of evil. The task is tremendous, humanly impossible. But where is the God we have preached, the power we have proclaimed, the courage and self-sacrifice we have so often extolled?

As I view the situation, the two outstanding foes of the kingdom are drink and war, and our immediate imperative task is a united effort for their overthrow. Over long have they held their iniquitous sway. The Baptist Governor of Virginia said that the eighteenth amendment to the Constitution could be enforced if the members of the Christian churches would stop bootlegging. They must stop or cease to be called by the Holy Name. The fight is on. Greed is against the kingdom. The appetites of the flesh are against the kingdom. All hell is against the kingdom, but God is for it. Are we? Without fear or fanaticism let us marshal our forces of the church, inspire them with the spirit of the kingdom, and make this a sober world. Mr. Rascob is reported to have said that the preachers slipped that amendment into the Constitution. Let us deserve the compliment by keeping it there.

The world war may not have made a warless world, but it accomplished something. It deglamoured war. On Flanders field all fictitious splendors were torn from its hideous features. No future slogan of glory can make us forget the stench of the trenches, the curses of the living, the shrieks and groans of the dying, the millions dead. It was so ghastly, so cruel, so useless, that our better natures rose in revolt, and registered the vow, "never again."

And under the Leader, the Prince of Peace, we must make our avowal good. He said the children of God are peacemakers. He taught us to pray, "Our Father in Heaven," and when the church practices the prayer it so often recites we shall create a kingdom civilization which will keep step with the heartbeats of the compassionate Christ rather than with the drum beats of merciless war.

The revival we need is a revival of devotion to Christ's objective, "Seek ye first the kingdom of God and his righteousness." A moral passion for his entire program. Why call me Lord and do not the things I command you." A salvation from sin, which shall mean deliverance, here and now, from the grip and tyranny of sin, and not simply an anticipated undeserved escape from the future consequences of sinning. "God is not mocked." As descendants of the priests we may be satisfied by adding numbers to our churches and dollars to its treasury, but as sons of the prophets, we shall be satisfied with nothing less than the personal and social righteousness of the sermon on the mount, making our Lord's sacrifice the incentive to this righteousness, and not a substitute for it. He did not die on Calvary to annul the laws of the kingdom.

My brethren, I love the church of Christ, and have special affection for the Baptist family in whose ministry I have spent fifty-three blessed years, and I greatly long that we shall be among the first to lift to commanding prominence the cross of Christ as the standard of his kingdom. For be assured that not until church Christians become kingdom Christians, "the salt of the earth and the light of the world," can we create a type of Christianity whose impact upon a sinful world will manifest its divine origin and energy, making our churches the conveyers of God's saving power, time and eternity, to all the needs of every soul. The present order, so cruelly dominated by crime and vice, disease and poverty, unbrotherliness and greed, must be saved, if saved at all, by the undivorced redemptive agencies of the Son of God. The apostle writes, "Having been reconciled to God by the death of his Son, much more we shall be saved by his life."

Take away his cross, and you have humanism. Ignore his example and ethical teachings and you have superstition. Unite them in a compelling, controlling principle of life, and you have his completed, all-sufficient, saving gospel of the kingdom.

"Thy Kingdom Come. Thy will be done on earth as in heaven."  
For the consummation of this holy purpose we repledge our allegiance to Thee and thy kingdom, O Christ, our King.