

## SEEKING MEMBERSHIP IN GOD'S KINGDOM

"Seek ye first the Kingdom of God and His righteousness."  
– Matthew 6:33.

AT THE beginning of our Lord's earthly ministry the Jewish nation were invited to become the Kingdom of God. The offer of God's chief blessing was "to the Jew first." For many centuries they had been God's special people. They had been called to be unto God "a kingdom of priests and an holy nation" – a peculiar treasure unto God, composed of a priestly class and a chosen, holy people. (Exodus 19:5,6.) We do not understand that all Israel from the time of the giving of the Law could have been of the Heavenly Kingdom, however faithful they might have been. None could be of this Kingdom class before Jesus came to earth; for He was the Forerunner of this class. The offer was made to the Jews of His day. But those of the nation who lived previously, and who had been faithful to God, true to their Covenant, shall be greatly blessed of the Lord on the human plane. They shall be used to bless all nations under Spiritual Israel – the Kingdom of God now being set up.

God's special favor to the people of natural Israel in choosing them above any other nation was especially because they were the seed of His faithful friend, Abraham. God had promised Abraham that because of his faith and obedience his seed should be blessed. It was not because they were of themselves holier or better than other peoples. (See Exodus 32:9-13; Deuteronomy 9:4-8.) But for their fathers' sakes God chose them to be His people.

At our Lord's First Advent the time had come for the offer of membership in the Kingdom, for the testing of the whole nation of Israel, to prove whether they were ready for this choice blessing. Jesus was the One to offer this Kingdom; for He had consecrated

Himself a Sacrifice for sin, which would constitute a basis for the establishment of the Kingdom on earth.

## **TRUE AND FALSE IDEAS OF THE KINGDOM**

The Sermon on the Mount, from which our text is taken, points out the earnestness and singleness of heart necessary in those who would become members of the Kingdom class. The Master intimates that not all of this favored nation who heard His Message would be ready to accept it. Many were absorbed in the things of this life – in what they would eat, what they would drink, what they would wear. But in order to be ready to receive the proffered blessing, in order to be acceptable to God, they must make the Kingdom their first interest. "Seek ye *first* the Kingdom of God and His righteousness," enjoined the Savior, not the earthly things. If the Kingdom was made *first*, all their earthly needs would be supplied; "All these things shall be added unto you," was His promise.

Not many of the Jews were ready for so drastic a Teacher. They had their own plans – business plans, political plans, social functions. Hence this invitation of Jesus to leave all to obtain a Kingdom of which they knew nothing and which seemed so intangible did not find a very ready response. The twelve Apostles were among the first to accept His offer. At the time of Jesus' death, something over five hundred had joined themselves to Him as His disciples. Of these we are told that one hundred and twenty were gathered in the upper room on the day of Pentecost, where they received the begetting of the Holy Spirit. After Pentecost some thousands of Jews came to **[R5918 : page 197]** the point of decision to make the Kingdom of God their first business. These, however, were but a small minority of the nation of Israel.

Throughout this Gospel Age there have been a few who have heard the Call and accepted the conditions, who have determined to make the Kingdom of God the first consideration of their lives. Satan has tried to make many of these think that papacy is that Kingdom,

or that Great Britain or Russia or some one of the other kingdoms of earth is that Kingdom. To others he brought a misinterpretation of the words of the Apostle, "The Kingdom of God is righteousness and peace and joy in the Holy Spirit," and endeavored to make them think that all there was of the Kingdom of God was merely righteousness and holiness of life, living a godly life through the power of the Lord's Spirit. How far all this is from the teaching of the Scriptures regarding the Kingdom can be readily seen by a study of the subject of the Kingdom of God as presented by the Holy Prophets, the Apostles and our Lord Jesus Himself. Truly we have a wily Adversary!

### **HOW CHRISTIANS MAY KEEP GOD'S LAW**

By these false ideas the true thought of the Kingdom was obscured – the thought that God was selecting the members of the Kingdom class, the thought that we not only make a full consecration of our little all to the Lord according to His terms, but that we should continually put this vow of consecration into practice, counting all other things as loss and dross that we might win a membership in this glorious company of which Jesus is the Head. This obscuration of mind still continues with the majority of those who have professed the name of Christ; but the full complement of Body members of Christ is being secured, despite Satan's vigorous efforts to prevent it. Now the number is almost full; indeed the few now coming in, we believe, are merely taking the places vacated by some who by unfaithfulness have lost the crown laid up for them; for we understand that the full number had accepted the offer and been begotten of the Spirit when the general Call ceased, in the fall of 1881. See STUDIES IN THE SCRIPTURES, Vol. III., Chap. 6 – "The Work of the Harvest."

In seeking the Kingdom of God we as Gentiles are to realize that the Lord has not changed from His original **[R5918 : page 198]** position held when He made the proposition to Israel that in

order to obtain everlasting life they must keep the Law. *There is no other way*. God will not exalt to Kingdom honors any who are violators of His Law. The question then comes in, How can we keep the Law? If the Jews could not keep it in all those sixteen hundred years, how could we keep it? And does not the Lord say through the Apostle that by the deeds of the Law shall no flesh be justified in His sight? To understand this is to understand some of the deep things of God; namely, that "God is in Christ reconciling the world [those from the world who now accept the Gospel Call] unto Himself, not imputing their trespasses unto them." – 2 Corinthians 5:19.

### **"YOUR BODIES MEMBERS OF CHRIST"**

Christ kept the Law and satisfied Divine Justice for all who become His during the Gospel Age; and His merit is imputed to those who keep the Law *in their heart* and are hindered from keeping it *absolutely* by the weaknesses of their fallen flesh which they are unable to control. And so St. Paul says that the righteousness of the Law is fulfilled in us who walk not after the flesh, but after the Spirit. First of all, through the imputation of His merit to their mortal bodies, their flesh, our Redeemer covers their natural imperfections. Second, because that body so devoted, so justified, is sacrificed, He reckons them dead as human beings. They are then begotten to a new, a spirit nature. Thenceforth their mortal body is counted as the body of the New Creature, no longer as a human body; for this was sacrificed. Actually, however, it is quickened to be the servant of the New Creature. Being still actually human, it must be given a robe of righteousness to wear until the end of the present life. This is furnished by our Savior.

The Apostle Paul, in speaking of our human bodies from the standpoint of our new relationship in Christ Jesus, says, "Know ye not that your bodies are members of Christ?" (1 Corinthians 6:15.) God no longer counts our fleshly body as the body of a human being. It is a member of Christ, the property of the spiritual New Creature.

This New Creature keeps the Law of God. Wherein there is failure, it is not the New Creature that fails, but the imperfect flesh, which is covered by the pure, white robe of Christ's righteousness. God looks upon it as the spotless body of this New Creature. Thus we stand perfect before God's Law; thus the righteousness of the Law is fulfilled in us who are walking, not according to the flesh, but in the footsteps of Jesus.

### **LIBERTY IN CHRIST NOT THAT OF MEAT AND DRINK**

Our text enjoins that we seek God's righteousness. This seems to imply that for those He is now calling God has provided a righteousness. This righteousness is in Christ, and it must be accepted by every one who comes to God; otherwise, not having the righteousness of God and the assistance that goes with it, he will not be able to attain unto the Kingdom.

The New Creature is so in accord with the Lord that he will seek to bring his mortal body fully under the control of the Law of Love. He will seek to be altogether just toward his fellowmen, toward the brethren, and kind and merciful toward all. His entire life will be given up to attaining membership in the Heavenly Kingdom. This will lead him to serve the cause of God's righteousness. Wherever God's plans are set aside, he would be called upon to defend them in every reasonable way. He will be on the side of righteousness and truth. All who truly seek the Kingdom have this disposition.

When the Apostle Paul says that the Kingdom of God is not meat and drink, but righteousness, peace and joy in the Holy Spirit, we are to understand him to mean, as shown in the context, that the privileges of those who are of this Kingdom class do not consist merely in liberty to eat and drink things forbidden to those under the Law or to those in bondage to heathen superstitions, but our liberty is far superior to this. Those Jews who became followers of Christ were informed that they were now free from the regulations of the

Law which restricted their food, etc. As to whether they would now eat pork or something else was thereafter to be regulated by conditions and circumstances. They had liberty in Christ that they had not, as Jews, previously enjoyed.

But St. Paul points out that this is not the chief liberty – to be able to eat oysters, pork and other things forbidden by the Law. This permission would not be much of a blessing. The chief element of their freedom in Christ was that true righteousness and holiness which is the blessing and comfort of all those who are the sons of God. Nor was it the Apostle's thought that righteousness, peace and joy constitute the Kingdom, but that these are the blessed results of membership in the Kingdom class. They are blessings which are the heritage of those who are heirs of the Kingdom, even while they are still under age, as it were, still being tutored and prepared for Kingdom service beyond the veil. All of the Lord's people are now to rejoice in true righteousness, the righteousness of God, and to seek it above all else.

