

PRINCIPLES OF THE KINGDOM (1) – (3)

Scripture Reading: Matt. 8:1-3, 5-13; 9:9-17; Matt. 10:16-22, 34-39; 11:11-12, 18-19, 25-27, 28-30; Matt. 12:1-8, 15-21, 28, 38-42; 16:1, 4

Matthew's purpose is not to present a chronological sequence of events. Some incidents that occurred later in the Lord's life, Matthew mentions earlier, and some events that occurred earlier, he mentions later. He does this to show us a picture. The whole book is a picture of the kingdom. The first aspect of the kingdom that Matthew shows is the seed of the kingdom. Chapter 1 presents not only the King of the kingdom but also the seed of the kingdom. There is no doubt that the Lord Jesus is the King, yet this King is also the seed of the kingdom. To say that the Lord Jesus is only the King is too objective. We must see that the Lord Jesus is not only the King of the kingdom but also the seed. This is subjective. This seed is a wonderful person who has been sown into us. As we mentioned previously, Christ is the issue of many human generations mingled with the Triune God. He is Jehovah-plus and God-plus.

Chapter 2 continues by showing who are the proper persons to receive this seed. Then chapter 3 presents the beginning of the preaching of the kingdom. In chapter 4 we are told what kind of people the Lord Jesus called into the kingdom. He did not go to the religious center or to the temple to call the religious people. He did not call scholars, priests, scribes, or lawyers. Rather, He went to the fishing wharf and called some young people who were simple fishermen. After three and a half years these young fishermen became the pillars of the first local church on earth, the church in Jerusalem. Then in chapters 5 through 7, those called by the Lord Jesus followed Him to the mountaintop. There He gave them a definition of the real kingdom life. In this discourse the Lord Jesus described the reality of the kingdom. **Chapter 8, which presents the first case illustrating the kingdom recorded in Matthew, begins after the Lord's descent from the mountain. Let us now consider this first case.**

THE FIRST CASE—THE LEPER

The first case concerns a leper who came to the Lord Jesus asking to be cleansed (vv. 1-4). It is very significant that this case is mentioned first. No doubt Matthew deliberately recorded it first. According to Leviticus 13 and 14, it was quite difficult for a leper to be cleansed. But in Matthew 8 it was very easy: the leper simply came, asked the Lord Jesus to cleanse him, and He did it. What does this signify? **It signifies that all who would participate in the kingdom are lepers. You must realize that you are a leper. We are all lepers. But Hallelujah! The Lord Jesus can build up His kingdom with cleansed lepers!** The Lord Jesus can establish the kingdom of the heavens with and among cleansed lepers. In other words, He can change lepers into heavenly citizens.

Do you not have the sense within that you are a leper? Do not think that all the people who enter into the kingdom of the heavens are marvelous. No! They are lepers. You need to realize that **unless you are a leper you have no share in the kingdom of the heavens**. The kingdom of the heavens does not call saints; it calls lepers. This realization will truly humble us. We all must humble ourselves and say, *“Lord Jesus, by my natural birth I am not worthy of Your kingdom. By nature I am an unclean leper.”* No one except the Lord Jesus can cleanse the lepers. We are all lepers, but we have been cleansed by His blood and by His life. According to Leviticus 14, the cleansing of leprosy required the blood of a bird and water. The blood represents the blood of the Lord Jesus, and the water represents His life. We are cleansed by His blood and by His life. First Corinthians 6:9-11 says that the unclean people—in a sense, we may call them lepers—have no inheritance in the kingdom. However, we should remember the but. *“But you were washed, but you were sanctified, but you were justified.”* Today, by the Lord’s redemption, we are no longer lepers; we are citizens of the heavenly kingdom. The first case recorded by Matthew indicates that the citizens of the kingdom of the heavens are lepers who have been cleansed.

THE SECOND CASE—THE CENTURION

Now we come to the second case, also not found in the Gospel of John. This is the case of a Roman centurion, a Gentile, whose servant was sick (Matt. 8:5-13). The centurion asked the Lord Jesus to come and heal his servant. When the Lord Jesus indicated His willingness to come, the centurion said, “Lord, I am not fit for You to enter under my roof; but only speak a word, and my servant will be healed. For I also am a man under authority, having soldiers under me. And I say to this one, Go, and he goes; and to another, Come, and he comes; and to my slave, Do this, and he does it” (vv. 8-9). This is very meaningful. **It indicates that the centurion recognized that the Lord Jesus had real authority over heaven and earth.** This case regarding authority is found in Matthew because it illustrates the kingdom. The kingdom is the authority of the Lord Jesus. At the end of Matthew, the Lord Jesus said, “All authority has been given to Me in heaven and on earth. Go therefore and disciple all the nations” (28:18-19). When we go out to preach the gospel, we must go with the authority of the Lord Jesus. All authority is in His hands.

The case of the centurion illustrates faith. The people in the kingdom must be people of faith. What is faith? It is difficult to define faith. Although there is a definition of faith in Hebrews 11:1, we may read it several times and still not understand what faith is. Stated simply, faith is the realization of what the Lord Jesus is. Whenever you realize the Lord Jesus in a certain way, spontaneously you have faith as a result of that realization. The centurion said that there was no need for the Lord Jesus to come to his house, because he realized that He was the highest authority. All authority was in His hand. If He would say the word, everything would be well. This is faith. This is an illustration of realizing what the Lord Jesus is.

The people in the kingdom **first** are lepers, and **then** they are believers. To be a leper means to be unclean; to be a believer means to be a person of faith in the Lord Jesus. On the one hand, we are lepers; on the other hand, we have a certain realization of the Lord Jesus. Realization is faith. **Some people say that**

it is hard to believe, or to have faith. But actually, once you have a realization of something, **it is more difficult not to believe**. If you say it is difficult to have faith, it means that you do not know what faith is. **Faith is the realization of a certain thing**. If you have ever seen or realized what the Lord Jesus is, it will be difficult for you not to believe in Him. Likewise, some say that it is easy to stumble and fall, but really **it is difficult to fall**. How many times have you fallen during the last thirty days? I have not fallen for a number of years. **Actually, it is easier to stand than to fall. If you try to fall, you will find it difficult**. In the same way, it is not difficult to have faith. Do not accept the lie that it is hard to believe. We all must declare, *"Hallelujah! It is easy for us to believe."* It is easier to believe than not to believe. Even if the heavens were to disappear and the earth were removed, I could not help believing. Can you give up your faith? Can you stop believing in the Lord Jesus? **If you tried to give up your faith and to stop believing in Him, refusing to be a Christian anymore, you would find that you simply could not do it**. Hallelujah! We all have faith.

The citizens of the kingdom are people of faith, not people who are qualified by natural birth. Nothing from our natural birth counts for the kingdom. The Lord Jesus said that many will come from the east and the west to be in the kingdom of the heavens, but the sons of the kingdom, those who are Jewish by their natural birth, will have no part in the kingdom (Matt. 8:11-12). This shows that the entrance into the kingdom of the heavens does not depend upon our natural birth. No one is qualified to enter the kingdom by his natural birth. It does not matter whether you were born nice or tough, slow or quick. Whatever you have by nature means nothing as far as the kingdom is concerned. You must be a person of faith.

These cases illustrate some basic principles. The case of the leper illustrates that we are all unclean. The case of the centurion illustrates faith, including the principle that we are not qualified or disqualified by our natural birth. The only thing that matters is faith, and faith is the realization of what the Lord Jesus is.

The more we look unto Him, consider Him, and trust Him, the more we are in the kingdom and become citizens of the kingdom.

Both the cleansed lepers and the people who by natural birth have no share in the kingdom can receive the wonderful matter called faith. It simply comes. It is difficult to tell how it comes or from where it comes. Perhaps you and your classmates listened to the same gospel message. They did not receive faith, but you did. And once you have received it, you can never rid yourself of it. Day after day, it will bother you. You may even try to cast it away, but you cannot. What is the source of such faith? Acts 13:48 reveals that having faith proves we have been predestinated by God. Before the foundation of the world God predestinated you and marked you out. If you try to escape or flee from this faith, you cannot, because you have been predestinated. I have no doubt that you have been predestinated. That is why you believed when you heard the message of the gospel. Actually, you were chosen before you were even born. Even if you tried to give up the Christian faith, you would be unable to do so because God chose you before you were born. Thus, you have faith. The source of faith is God's predestination. We all have such faith, and we all are citizens of the kingdom. Although none of us are qualified to enter the kingdom by our natural birth, we may enter by faith. We have become citizens of the kingdom of the heavens by faith.

THE THIRD CASE—A TAX COLLECTOR

The tax collector in Matthew 9 is a case that further illustrates the kingdom. Verse 9 says that Matthew was a publican, a tax collector, a Jew who collected taxes for the Roman imperialists. Such publicans were despised by the Jews because they were helping the Roman imperialists to damage the Jewish nation. Matthew was such a person. Spiritually speaking, he was a leper who was cleansed. Although his natural situation was that of a leper, he received faith. The leprosy went and faith came, so the Lord Jesus went to feast with him. The feast mentioned in verse 10, the great reception of Luke 5:29, was prepared by Matthew. Matthew held a great feast to celebrate his entrance

into the kingdom. This was certainly a worthwhile celebration, for a publican had entered into the kingdom. While the Lord Jesus was enjoying the feast, the religious people who had so many regulations were troubled. Both the old-time religionists, the disciples of the Pharisees, and the new-time religionists, the disciples of John the Baptist, were troubled (Matt. 9:11-14). They were all offended because the Lord Jesus was feasting with tax collectors and sinners. Hence, the Lord Jesus told them that the strong have no need of a physician, but those who are ill. He also told them that He desires mercy and not sacrifice, for He did not come to call the righteous but sinners (vv. 10-13).

At that time John's disciples also asked the Lord a question: "Why do we and the Pharisees fast much, but Your disciples do not fast?" The Lord answered them in a wonderful way: "The sons of the bridechamber cannot mourn as long as the bridegroom is with them, can they?" (v. 15). A bridegroom is always a very pleasant person. As the seed of the kingdom, the Lord Jesus is not only the Savior, Lord, and King, but also the Bridegroom. He is very pleasant. How strange it would be for people to fast on the wedding day, especially in the presence of the bridegroom. That would be an insult and a shame to the bridegroom himself. In the presence of the bridegroom we must have enjoyment. The more we enjoy ourselves, the happier the bridegroom will be. We all need to enjoy the Lord.

The first case, the leper, signifies cleansing; the second case, the centurion, signifies faith versus natural birth. The third case, the tax collector, represents the enjoyment of those who are in the kingdom. Once we are cleansed and have received faith, we must feast with the Lord Jesus as the Bridegroom. We must enjoy Him as the most pleasant person.

THE WEDDING GARMENT AND THE NEW WINE

The Lord Jesus is not only the Bridegroom; He is also the wedding garment (v. 16). We cannot feast with Him unless we are clothed with the proper garment. He Himself is our new garment. He is also the new wine, which fills us within

(v. 17). Thus, He is the new garment without and the new wine within. As the new garment covering us, Christ is our righteousness, and as the new wine that fills us up, Christ is our life. He is our Bridegroom whom we enjoy, and He is also our qualification for enjoying Him. He is the new garment, and He is the new strength, the inner energy, that we need to appreciate and enjoy Him. Christ is also the new wineskin, the proper church life, that preserves the wine. We were lepers, but we have been cleansed by the blood and life of the Lord Jesus. We have received faith and believe in Him. Now we are feasting with Him as our pleasant Bridegroom.

THE OPPOSITION OF **HUMAN CULTURE** TO THE KINGDOM

Matthew 10 reveals another principle of the kingdom. Although our leprosy has been cleansed and faith is here for our enjoyment of Christ, we must realize that human culture stands in opposition to the kingdom of God. **The primary elements of human culture are religion, politics, and the family life.** Human culture is the best invention of mankind. However, we have to realize that Satan in a subtle way utilizes human culture to oppose God's kingdom....

In Matthew 10:16-22 the Lord said that He was sending the kingdom people forth as sheep in the midst of wolves. He went on to say that they will be delivered up to sanhedrins and scourged in the synagogues. The sanhedrins were the strongest organization of the Jewish religion at that time, and the synagogues were the places where the Jewish people met to worship God. Yet, it is in the synagogues that the kingdom people will be scourged. This reveals that the **religious** people will persecute the kingdom people.

The Lord also said that they will be brought before governors and kings, a clear reference to the **political** people. These verses tell us that both religion and politics are against the kingdom of God. Why are they opposed to God's kingdom? It is because they have their own kingdoms; religion is a kingdom for religious people, and politics is a kingdom for political people. King Herod was troubled when he heard the news of the birth of the Lord Jesus because he was

afraid of losing his kingdom. The situation is the same today. The entire human culture stands in opposition to the kingdom of the heavens. Which religion was so much against the kingdom? It was not a pagan religion but the typical religion of Judaism. The people who worshipped God in the temple and in the synagogues were the persecutors of the kingdom people. If we go along with human culture and religion, we will be welcomed and not persecuted. But if we are for the Lord's kingdom, religion will oppose us. That was the situation when the Lord Jesus and the apostles were on the earth. If we mean business with the Lord's kingdom, we will experience the same opposition today.

After the Lord spoke about religion and politics, He referred to the **family** (v. 21). The Lord spoke about fathers and sons, mothers and daughters, and other family relations (vv. 35-37). Not all of your relatives will be in favor of the kingdom. The situation is the same today as then. Do not think that people are nicer today than then. The cultured people may be even tougher and more severe than the uncultured people. I am not encouraging you to damage your family life, to be an enemy toward your father, or to persecute your wife. If you read the Lord's word carefully, you will see that the kingdom people should be the persecuted ones, not the persecuting ones. We should not be the enemies, and we should not be the persecutors. We have to be the persecuted ones. **We should flee if we can, but if we cannot, we must suffer.** According to other portions of the Bible, we must pray for the opposers and the persecutors (5:44). We must love them and pray that they will become the same as we are. **Mainly, we need to realize this principle: the whole of human culture opposes the kingdom of God.**

We should not be disturbed by this, because the opposition of human culture can become our "gasoline station" where we can purchase the extra portion of oil for our vessel (25:9). This means that we take the opportunity to pay the price of losing our soul-life (10:38-39). **The price we must pay is our soul-life. Sometimes a husband is caught for the kingdom, but his wife remains a part of human culture. In such a case the husband must lose his soul-life.** The Lord

Jesus spoke clearly about these matters. He has never cheated us. He said that He did not come to bring **peace**, but a **sword** (v. 34).

TAKING THE KINGDOM BY VIOLENCE

Let us now proceed to chapter 11 where we see even more principles of the kingdom. One of the principles revealed in this chapter is that we must be violent against all opposition to the kingdom of God (v. 12). We should not be so nice, or we will be unable to enter the kingdom. We must be violent for the sake of the kingdom. For example, if there is no opposition to my walking through a door, I may walk in nicely as a gentleman. However, if some enemies oppose my entry and attempt to frustrate me, I must be violent and use force in order to enter. This was what the Lord Jesus had in mind when He spoke about the time of John the Baptist's ministry, which was a transitional period. It was neither the Old Testament age nor the New Testament age. John proclaimed the kingdom, saying, "Repent, for the kingdom of the heavens has drawn near." By making this proclamation, he aroused strong opposition. When the Lord Jesus appeared, He proclaimed the same message. This preaching of the kingdom aroused opposition from the religious people. The chief opposition against the kingdom came from Judaism. It was very difficult for anyone to enter into the kingdom at that time because the Pharisees, Sadducees, and priests opposed their entry. By their opposition they became enemies of the kingdom. Although the entrance was pointed out and even opened by John the Baptist and the Lord Jesus, the Jewish people rose up in opposition. If you wanted to enter into the kingdom at that time, you had to be violent.

The same principle applies today. If you want to get into the proper church life, **you need to be at least a little violent because the opposers, criticizers, and enemies are fighting to keep you out.** Since they make every attempt to frustrate you, what should you do? **You must be violent!** Our present environment is much the same as the one that was created after John's preaching. When John came and proclaimed the kingdom, immediately the

Pharisees, Sadducees, scribes, and priests rose up to oppose. According to the Lord's word, everyone who entered the kingdom during that time had to be violent. Do you think today's situation is different? It is the same. Since the local church has been proclaimed in this country, the opposition has been stirred up. **I am not trying to be wild, and I am not teaching you to be tough and rough. I do not want you to be rough, but I do expect that you will be violent for the kingdom of God.**

NO OUTWARD REGULATIONS

Let us go on to see another principle of the kingdom related to John the Baptist. In speaking about John the Baptist, the Lord Jesus established this principle: in the kingdom, **unlike in religion, there are no regulations**. In Judaism there are many regulations about eating and drinking. When John the Baptist came not eating and drinking in a normal way, people said that he had a demon. When the Lord Jesus came both eating and drinking, they called Him a gluttonous man and a drunkard (v. 19). They said that John the Baptist was demon-possessed for not eating and drinking, and they said that the Lord Jesus was gluttonous because He did eat and drink. You may ask, Which is right—to eat or not to eat? to drink or not to drink? Judaism has many regulations about these matters, **but in the kingdom there are no such regulations**. This does not mean, however, that there is looseness. Rather, in the kingdom there are the children of **wisdom. Wisdom is justified by her children** (v. 19, see also footnote 4 in the Recovery Version). **All the kingdom people are children of wisdom...**

THE KINGDOM REVEALED TO BABES

Matthew 11:25-27 reveals another basic principle: **the kingdom is absolutely a matter of divine revelation**. After speaking about John the Baptist, the Lord turned to talk to the Father. Verse 25 begins, “At that time Jesus answered and said...” The principle here is that **we should never exercise our wisdom or cleverness**. In the kingdom life we must forget our wisdom and cleverness. The

kingdom of the heavens is not a matter of our being wise or intelligent. If we think that we are wise or intelligent, we are finished as far as the kingdom is concerned. **We must be like infants.** If we become like infants, we will receive the revelation. God hides the kingdom from the wise and intelligent, but He reveals it to infants..

What is this revelation? The revelation is that the kingdom is nothing other than the Son of God (v. 27). This verse tells us that the revelation of the kingdom is **simply the revelation of Jesus Christ, the Son of God.** If you are religiously wise and intelligent, you will never receive the revelation of the kingdom. The kingdom is a heavenly revelation concerning the Lord Jesus. If you receive this revelation, you will know Him in such a rich way, in a way of tasting and in a way of life. In the church life we should continually have a vision of the Lord Jesus, not merely a doctrine about Him. The content of the kingdom is the wonderful Lord Jesus. Verse 27 gives us the revelation of the kingdom life. If we read this verse in its context beginning at verse 20, we will see that it is the revelation of the kingdom life. The revelation of the kingdom life is the revelation of the Son with the Father.

Many years ago I studied the Bible under the influence of some good teachers. However, the more I was taught, the less I knew the Lord Jesus. One day the Lord brought me to the local church. In a very short time I came to know the Lord Jesus, not in a doctrinal way but in a living way, in the way of life, taste, and enjoyment. Although I have been in this way for more than forty years, I cannot exhaust the enjoyment of the Christ revealed to me in the local churches. Nevertheless, I am still concerned that some of the dear ones may remain wise and intelligent in a religious way. If so, they will have no real knowledge of Christ and no genuine enjoyment of Him. We need to follow the principle that the revelation of the kingdom is given to infants.

Let us review the principles we have covered thus far in Matthew 11. First, due to the opposition of human culture, the kingdom must be taken by violence. Second, the kingdom is not a matter of outward regulations. Since the kingdom

life is the life of Christ, we should not make any outward regulations into a standard. Third, if we remain in the kingdom for the kingdom life, we must forget our wisdom and cleverness. It is awful to be religiously wise and intelligent. We need to become like infants, so simple and so single. Then we will know the Lord Jesus whom others cannot know. We will also know the Father. The Son with the Father will become our enjoyment.

A LIFE OF REST

Another principle of the kingdom is in Matthew 11:28-30. **Once we forsake our wisdom and intelligence, we will know the Lord Jesus and have a real enjoyment of Him. After this we will have rest.** The kingdom life is not only a life of enjoyment; it is also a life of rest. If you will apply the first three principles revealed in Matthew 11, all your burdens will be lifted. If you try to be wise and intelligent, you will be heavily burdened. You need to be unloaded. Who are the ones that are the most heavily burdened? It is the wise and intelligent ones, the religious ones, and the cultured ones. **The kingdom people, on the contrary, are the unloaded ones. Brothers and sisters, are you loaded or unloaded?** If you will be simple and single instead of religiously wise and intelligent, you will be unloaded, and you will have rest. The yoke you bear will be very light. This is the kingdom life. The kingdom life is a life of **feasting**, a life of **enjoyment**, and a life of **rest**.

Whenever you lose your rest, it is an indication that you are not experiencing the kingdom life. Whenever you are not in the kingdom life, you will certainly be heavily burdened. Your yoke will be the yoke of slavery. However, when you exercise the principle of forsaking your religious wisdom and intelligence and of being simple, you will be immediately unburdened. You will be released and emancipated and completely at rest.

Sometimes people come to me and say, "Brother Lee, you have many burdens. How can you bear them?" I answer, *"Brothers, I have no burdens. I only know how to do a little work. After working, I go home and rest."* This is the kingdom

life—**some work but no burden. There is a yoke, but the yoke is not heavy.** Actually, the yoke is also a kind of rest because without it we might depart from the Lord's way. If we would attempt to depart from the Lord's way, we would find that the yoke is there. This is the kingdom life. Matthew is a book of the kingdom. Our leprosy is gone, and faith is here. We are enjoying, and we are resting. Let the religious people persecute, and let the enemies oppose. We should be violent to enter the kingdom by force. We have no outward regulations, and we have no burdens because we do not exercise our religious wisdom and intelligence. We are simple. We do not care what other people say about us. We only care for the rest in Christ. When we are heavily burdened, Satan is happy; but when we are resting, he trembles. This is the kingdom life.

Chapter 12 of Matthew reveals some further principles concerning the kingdom. Have you ever noticed the first few words of chapter 12? It begins with the words At that time.... "At that time" means the time when the Lord Jesus revealed the way to enter the rest.... At that time the Lord Jesus revealed to His disciples the way to find rest and to enjoy Him as rest in the kingdom. In **chapter 9** we have the way to enjoy the Lord as our **feast**; in **chapters 11 and 12** we have the way to enjoy Him as our **rest**.

Some may consider that the matter of enjoying the Lord should be found in John, the book of life, and not in Matthew, the book of the kingdom. But the kingdom is also a matter of enjoyment, and this enjoyment is just the Lord Jesus Himself. Do not think that the Lord Jesus as the kingdom is only a matter of authority and kingship. **No—the Lord Jesus as the kingdom is also a matter of enjoyment.** If you have not experienced Him as your enjoyment, you cannot be in the kingdom to the fullest extent. We will have the full enjoyment of the Lord Jesus by realizing that we have Him as the kingdom life. **The more we realize Him as our kingdom life, the more we will enjoy Him as the feast.** If we have little enjoyment of Christ, we will have little experience of the kingdom.

In the same way, if we have no rest, neither will we have much experience of the kingdom. Suppose there were no government, rule, or law in the United

States. Do you think it would be possible to rest in this country? There would be no rest; instead, there would be constant turmoil. Likewise, true rest comes out of experiencing the Lord Jesus as our kingdom life. When we honor, realize, and partake of Him as our kingdom life, we enjoy Him as rest. He is not only our feast but also our rest. Both the feast and the rest are found in the kingdom. **Although we may think that the feast and rest are only related to life, they are also found in the kingdom.**

ENJOYMENT IN THE CHURCH LIFE

Many of us can testify that we have found such enjoyment in the church life. We have enjoyed so many feasts. Also, when we came into the church life, we realized that we had come **home**. **What is home?** It is the place of rest. Many Christians who were seeking the Lord very much were simply wandering aimlessly before they came into the church life. However, once they came into the church life, they had the feeling that they were home. I can never forget that during the years of 1969 and 1970, the testimonies in nearly every meeting were about this matter of finding a home in the church life. In those years one of the favorite songs had these words: "We are home! We are home! We are home!" In the local church we have the feast and we have the rest because the local church is the reality of the kingdom. The Lord is here not only as life but also as the kingdom life.

THE GREATER TEMPLE, THE PRESENT DAVID, AND THE LORD OF THE SABBATH

Let us consider the case in Matthew 12:1-8. While the religious people were keeping the Sabbath in the temple, synagogues, or homes, the Lord Jesus brought His disciples to the wheat field to gather wheat. The Pharisees saw them picking and eating the grains. How did it happen that the Pharisees were there? **They were the "Sabbath patrol," out on patrol, trying to find the Lord Jesus and His disciples breaking the Sabbath law.** Eventually, they caught the Lord and His disciples. (For more details, read *Christ versus Religion*.) Those poor religious Pharisees would prefer to keep people hungry in order to

observe the Sabbath. The real meaning of the Sabbath is rest. To keep the Sabbath is to have rest. **Even if you are suffering from hunger, the religious people would force you to observe the Sabbath regulations.** If you were hungry, and the religious people compelled you to keep the Sabbath laws, would that be a rest or a suffering? **No doubt it would be a suffering. But the religious ones do not care about the suffering; they only care for the Sabbath regulations.** To keep these regulations is to make yourself heavily burdened. Now we can understand the word of the Lord Jesus in Matthew 11:28: *“Come to Me all who toil and are burdened, and I will give you rest.”* Not only were the disciples hungry on that Sabbath day, but the men on the Sabbath patrol were also hungry. But they dared not to eat. They kept the Sabbath, yet they were suffering. This means that they were heavily burdened.

The Lord Jesus wants the heavily burdened ones to come to Him so that He can give them rest. How will He give them rest? By breaking the Sabbath! He will give them rest by breaking the laws that cause them to be heavily burdened. This is the way to find rest. Many Christians quote Matthew 11:28-30 without connecting it to the previous verses or to the following verses. When they preach the gospel, they use these verses, telling the hearers that they are heavily burdened with sins. **Strictly speaking, however, to be heavily burdened in this verse is not to be heavily burdened with sins but with religion, regulations, rules, rituals, and laws.** You need to be unloaded. You need to be emancipated and released. To be released is to be in the kingdom of God. The kingdom is not enslavement; it is emancipation. The kingdom of Satan is slavery; the kingdom of the heavens is emancipation. When you enter into the kingdom of the heavens, you will be completely unloaded. You will be fully released, liberated, and emancipated. You will enjoy the person of Christ. No longer will you be enslaved to regulations. In the kingdom we have the living Lord Jesus without any regulations. Truly this is our emancipation. As kingdom people, how many regulations do we have? We must be able to say, *“We have no regulations, but we do have the living Christ.”* What a release this is to us!

Suppose the brothers living in a brothers' house compiled a list of twenty-four regulations and posted it on the wall. If a young brother came to live in that house, **he would feel a heavy burden to keep all the regulations**. He would have to memorize them and recite them and attempt to keep them. I do not expect to see any such list in the brothers' house. I do not like to see regulations. I like to see a living person, Christ. In the brothers' house there should be only one living person—**no regulations**.

When the Lord Jesus was dealing with religious people, He was very wise. The Pharisees considered themselves to be very scriptural; they thought that they did everything according to the Bible. They kept the Sabbath according to the Bible. **But the Lord showed them that they really did not know the Bible at all. They knew the Bible in black and white letters, but they did not know it in the Spirit**. They did not know the Bible in Christ. The Lord Jesus rebuked them by asking them whether they had read what David did. He reminded them about the time David and his followers went into the temple and ate the bread of the Presence, which was not lawful for them to eat (1 Sam. 21:1-6; Lev. 24:9). He also asked whether they had read of the priests who were allowed to profane the Sabbath in the temple and be **guiltless** (Num. 28:9-10). As He spoke with them, the Lord Jesus revealed that He Himself is the greater temple and the present David (Matt. 12:3-7). **Many religious ones only care for knowing the Bible, but God's intention is for us to know Christ. We should not simply know the Bible in letters; we must know Christ in the Spirit**. We must know Christ in a living way and know Him as everything to us. **To know the Bible apart from Christ means nothing**.

It is quite difficult for the so-called scriptural people to break through the regulations. They are in bondage to what they think is the letter of the Bible. When we pray-read the words of the Bible, they ask if we have biblical ground for this. When we shout loudly as we are praising the Lord, they ask if we have a verse to justify this practice. They have been heavily burdened with regulations and Bible knowledge. They need to be released. They need to see

that in the kingdom it is not a matter of knowing the Bible; it is a matter of knowing the living Lord Jesus.

THE **HIDDEN** CHARACTER OF THE KINGDOM

Following this, Matthew quoted a portion from Isaiah telling us who the Lord Jesus was at that time (Matt. 12:18-21). The Lord Jesus was **a person with the Spirit of God. He did not strive or cry or shout or make Himself known to people on the streets**. He had no fame, and He made no name for Himself. In a sense He was very hidden. This is one of the most important aspects of the kingdom life. If we try to become great, if we try to make a name for ourselves, we will become the great tree instead of the little mustard herb (13:31-32)... He always kept Himself small. He did not strive; neither did anyone hear His voice on the street...

The kingdom today is not something great in appearance. In form, the kingdom life is small and lowly. No local church should display a grand appearance. Even if we have a large number, we should never flaunt it. We should not have any outward form. **The smaller our appearance, the better**. We must be little; even we must be nothing. We should be hidden and concealed all the time. If we put all these passages together, we will discover that the way to have rest in the kingdom life is not to be great or manifest or public. The way to enjoy Christ as our rest in the kingdom life is to remain small, concealed, and hidden. **We should never become a great tree; we must be the little mustard herb**.

THE SIGN OF JONAH

Another principle is also revealed in Matthew 12. The religious people came to the Lord Jesus asking for a sign, a miracle. They wanted Him to perform a miracle to prove that He was of God. He answered them in this way: "An evil and adulterous generation seeks after a sign, and a sign shall not be given to it except the sign of Jonah the prophet" (v. 39). Jonah was a prophet who spent three days and three nights buried within a great fish in the waters of death. After three days he came out. This was a type of the crucifixion and

resurrection of the Lord Jesus. The Lord Jesus indicated to the religious people that their generation would see no sign except the unique sign of the crucified and resurrected Christ.

The atmosphere among some religious people in our own time is the same. They always want to see signs, miracles, and healings. However, **in the kingdom life we should not display ourselves with signs and wonders. Rather, we should reveal ourselves as being crucified and resurrected.** The sign that is needed today is **not a wonder or a miracle; it is the sign of a crucified and resurrected person.**

We need to put all these principles together. At the end of chapter 11, the Lord Jesus began to show us the way to enjoy Him as rest in the kingdom life. In chapter 12 He revealed that we need to break the religious regulations but refuse to make ourselves great, public, and popular. We should not seek for popularity. We need to be hidden, small, and low. Furthermore, we should not make an ostentatious show by doing miracles and signs. **On the contrary, the more people require signs of us, the more we should go to the cross, the more we should be buried in the death water.** The more people expect us to do something extraordinary, the more we must go to the cross to be crucified and to the death water to be buried. Following crucifixion and burial, we will experience resurrection. The kingdom people have to be the crucified, buried, and resurrected people.