

FROM REJECTION TO GLORY (1)

Scripture Reading: Matt. 13:53-57; 14:1, 10, 12-13, 15-21, 23-32; 15:32-38; 17:1-8

Chapter 13 through the first part of chapter 17 comprises another section of the book of Matthew. We will be unable to understand the incidents recorded in these chapters if we do not consider them as a group. What does this section show us?

REJECTION BY RELIGION

At the end of chapter 12 there is an incident involving the mother and brothers of the Lord. When He learned that they wanted to speak with Him, He asked, “Who is My mother, and who are My brothers?” (v. 48). The Lord went on to say that it is not a matter of natural birth but of doing the will of God. Those who do the will of God are the Lord’s mother, brothers, and sisters. **The will of God mentioned here is not something small; it actually means the kingdom.** The Lord Jesus told people that those who do the will of God, who seek the kingdom of God—not those according to natural birth—are His brothers and sisters. The Lord made it very clear to His disciples that His relationships with people have nothing to do with natural birth. This even included His natural mother. Do not listen to the superstition of Catholicism which says that Mary was the “holy mother.” According to Matthew 12, the Lord Jesus repudiated everything that was according to natural birth, even His own mother.

Following this, in chapter 13, **the Lord gave all the parables, the mysteries of the kingdom.** Not one person is qualified by nature and intellectual capacity to understand these parables. The Lord Jesus made the kingdom a mystery, a hidden matter, just like a treasure hidden in a field. When the Lord Jesus found the kingdom, He immediately hid it. Where and when did He hide the kingdom? It was in Matthew 13. **After repudiating all natural relationships, He began to hide the kingdom from the natural people.** At the end of chapter 13 He was completely rejected by the natural, religious people. After speaking the seven parables, He returned to His own country and entered the synagogue, the place where religious people discussed the things of God. Although the Lord Jesus renounced everything natural, the people **in His own country recognized Him in a natural way.** They said, “Is not this the carpenter’s son? Is not His mother called Mary, and His brothers James and Joseph and Simon and Judas? And His sisters, are they not all here with us?” (vv. 55-56). The religious people knew Him in a natural way. In 2 Corinthians 5:16 Paul said that he did not know Christ according to the flesh, that is, according to anything natural. We should not know Him according to the flesh but according to the Spirit. The Pharisees and Judaizers knew Him according to the natural appearance. They knew His carpenter father, His mother, His brothers, and His sisters, but they did not know Him according to the Spirit. Rather, they rejected Him. The Lord had repudiated everything of natural birth and had made the kingdom a hidden mystery. So the religious people totally rejected Him.

PERSECUTION BY POLITICS

In chapter 14 we are told that Herod the king killed John the Baptist. When the report of this was brought to the Lord, He simply retreated into the wilderness. Remember that this is a book of the revelation of the kingdom. Since the Lord Jesus repudiated everything natural and made the kingdom a mystery, the religious people rejected Him and the kingdom, and the political people persecuted and killed those who accepted the kingdom. Hence, He went into the wilderness. If you had lived at that time and had wanted to follow Him, you would have had to go to the wilderness.

What does this mean? Chapter 13 through the first part of chapter 17 is a section showing us the period of time from the rejection of the Lord Jesus and His kingdom until the full coming of the kingdom. During this period between His rejection and the full manifestation of the kingdom, the kingdom people must follow Him by leaving religion and politics and going into the wilderness. We are still living in this period today, for it began at the time of Matthew 13 and will continue until the full manifestation of the kingdom. At the full coming of the kingdom, there will be the real and full transfiguration of all the kingdom people.

The transfiguration of the Lord Jesus on the mountaintop in Matthew 17 was a miniature of the full coming of the kingdom. It was the coming of the kingdom on a small scale. The full coming of the kingdom will occur in the future. The section of Matthew that we are presently considering goes from chapter 13 until the full coming of the kingdom in the future. During this period the kingdom people must follow the Lord Jesus by going into the wilderness. The background for this move into the wilderness was His rejection by religion and His persecution by politics. If we mean business with the Lord for the kingdom, we will certainly be rejected by religion and persecuted by politics. Do not expect anything more. There can be no friendship from religion and no kindness from politics. To be the kingdom people means that we will undergo opposition from religion and persecution from politics. As we have seen, the synagogues rejected Christ, and King Herod killed John the Baptist, the forerunner of Christ. When the Lord Jesus heard of this, He did not fight or say anything. He and His disciples retreated into the wilderness. What does this mean? It means that the kingdom people are a people out of this world, out of religion, and out of politics. **In a sense, until the kingdom comes in full, we are in the wilderness.** In reality, we are the kingdom people and we are in the kingdom, but outwardly speaking, we are living in the wilderness.

A LIFE IN THE WILDERNESS

How can we make a living in the wilderness? The answer to this question is found in the case of Jesus' feeding five thousand people with five loaves and two fish (14:19-21). John uses the same case to indicate that Christ is the bread of life (John 6). Matthew, however, uses this case

in a different way, showing how the Lord can afford us a living in the wilderness. If you simply follow Him, He can provide you a living. As we preached the gospel in the Far East, sometimes the unbelievers would ask us, “Can Jesus take care of my eating? Will Jesus always afford something for my living?” Many times the unbelievers asked us these questions, and we dared not answer them. But I can tell you, the kingdom people, that the Lord Jesus truly provides us a living.

In Matthew 6:33 the Lord Jesus said that if we seek the kingdom first, everything we need will be added to us. While all the religious and political people are busy earning a living, the kingdom people follow the Lord Jesus in the wilderness. Even the disciples had a natural thought concerning their living. They recognized the need of the people and advised the Lord Jesus to disperse them into the villages to purchase something to eat. Actually, eating here refers to the entire realm of making a living. The Lord Jesus answered, “They do not need to go away. You give them something to eat” (14:16). We are all familiar with what happened. With only five loaves and two fish the Lord Jesus fed the entire multitude. This case shows us a principle: the kingdom people who are following the Lord Jesus must realize that their living is not based upon their doing or working but upon His caring. The Lord Jesus cares for their living.

As you read this, you may be asking, “Should we all give up our jobs and simply follow the Lord?” If you could do this, it would be wonderful. But as we discover later in the Epistles, we should still keep our jobs. However, we should not put our trust in our jobs for our living. We should never allow our jobs to frustrate us from following the Lord. Following Him and seeking the kingdom must be first, and all we need will be added to us. Eventually, the thousands of people who followed the Lord Jesus into the wilderness had something to eat. This is living by faith. The kingdom people live by faith, and they live in the wilderness. Today the Lord and His kingdom are still rejected by religion and politics. Therefore, we must follow the Lord Jesus by going to Him in the wilderness. Following Him must be our consuming desire. Do not be anxious about your education, profession, or job. Do not worry about your living. If you follow Him, He will care for your living.

A WAY ON THE STORMY SEA

After feeding the multitude, the Lord Jesus went to a high mountain to pray, and He sent His disciples to the sea (vv. 22-23). This is a picture showing us that the Lord Jesus has ascended into the heavens and that He has put all of us on the sea. **The life of the kingdom people today is a life in the wilderness, and the way of the kingdom people is a way on the stormy sea.** Our way on the sea is beset by tossing waves and contrary winds. As we follow the Lord Jesus, many times we will not have a comfortable feeling, and we will experience the contrary winds.

Although our life is in the wilderness and our way is on the sea, we should not worry. In the wilderness the Lord provides food to eat. Our way, being on the stormy sea, is quite risky. We must remember, however, that the Lord is on the mountaintop in the heavens praying for us (v. 23). Also, He comes to us walking on the sea, with all the waves under His feet. Although we may be frightened by the tossing waves, they are under His feet (v. 25). He walks over all the waves. Since He treads over the waves, why should we be afraid of them? The Lord Jesus rebuked Peter because he had little faith. As the kingdom people, our life is in the wilderness, and our way is on the sea. For both our living and our way, we need living faith.

Among many Christians and Christian organizations, the primary concern is how to raise money. I praise the Lord that from the first day I came into the church life, there has been no need to discuss the raising of funds. Let me tell you a story that Brother Watchman Nee related to me. The first local church in China was raised up in Foochow in 1922. The brothers met outside of Christianity and outside of denominations. Nearly all of them were students, many still in high school. Brother Nee was about nineteen years of age and was helping take the lead. They began to meet in a small home and eventually had the need to rent a larger place to contain the new converts. Few among those Chinese students had much money; most were quite poor. In one of the meetings the leading brother stood up and said, "Brothers and sisters, here is a Chinese long gown for winter use, which has been offered by a brother. If this can be sold, the price will go toward the payment of the rent for the new meeting place." He did not say who offered the long gown but simply brought it to the meeting and announced that it was available to anyone who needed it. Two sisters were sitting there. One received the burden to buy it as soon as the announcement was made. On the other side of the room she saw a brother who was quite uncomfortable due to the winter cold. There was, of course, no heat in the room. The sister saw the brother in need and had the burden to help him. When the responsible brother announced the price of eight dollars, she spoke with the sister sitting next to her asking, "Why don't we buy this long gown for that brother?" The sister immediately responded, "I had the same feeling, but I have just four dollars." Both sisters had the same feeling and the same amount of money. Right away they stood up, went to the front, and bought the long gown for eight dollars. Then they asked that it be given to the brother who was uncomfortable from the cold. Who do you think that brother was? He was the brother who had originally offered the gown! Thus, both the need for the hall and the need of the brother were cared for by the Lord. We have seen the faithfulness of the Lord in many such experiences.

To illustrate further, when I came to this country, I had very little money. I was not sent here and supported regularly by a mission. As some of the brothers from Taipei could testify, I came to this country without the promise of any support. You may ask, "How then was the work started?" It simply started. The work started in this country in 1963, and we were burdened to publish the little magazine called The Stream. Although we had almost no funds, the brothers

transcribed the messages, polished them, and were prepared to put them into print. As the time came to print them, we looked at one another. There was no need to discuss money; we all realized we did not have enough. By the Lord's mercy I had two hundred dollars, and I contributed that toward the cost of printing. Eventually, the account contained four hundred dollars. That was the beginning of the publication of The Stream.

We need to believe in the Lord Jesus. If our living is in the wilderness, He will take care of us. If our way is on the sea, He is on the mountain praying for us and treading upon all the waves. The waves are under His feet. Eventually, the little boat with the disciples in it came safely to shore. Both the disciples who remained in the boat and Brother Peter who jumped out of the boat were kept safe.

The little boat signifies your little job. Your teaching job or your profession is a little boat. Whether you stay in the boat or come out of the boat, you must still trust in the Lord's call. I do not encourage you to leave the boat; that may frighten you. However, if you hear the word of the Lord saying, "Come," then you may leap out of the boat. Do not put all your trust in the boat. Some people believe in the Lord Jesus but also rely on the boat. Although the Lord is treading over the waves, they still need a little boat to carry them. Peter saw that it was the Lord, and he leaped out of the boat and went to Him. However, whether you keep the job or jump out of the job, it eventually will make no difference. The Lord will take care of you.

This portion of Matthew reveals the way to follow the Lord Jesus during the period from His rejection until the full coming of the kingdom. **The way to follow Him is the way of faith. Faith is not something of our thinking or reasoning.** Faith is simply the realization of what Christ is. No matter how much religion has rejected Him and politics has persecuted Him, He is still the Lord of all! The rejected Jesus, the persecuted Jesus, is able to feed five thousand men with five loaves and two fish. In Matthew 15 the Lord fed another great multitude in the wilderness, once again showing that He could provide them a living.

In 1933 the Lord Jesus called me to give up my job. Why do I say that the boat in chapter 14 of Matthew represents our job? Because this corresponds to my experience. The year that I gave up my job, I felt just like Peter leaving the boat. To my sensation, the job I had was a little boat. In my little boat, I was quite safe. If I should jump out of this boat, giving up my job, what would become of my living? What would I rely upon? But the Lord Jesus called me to forsake that little boat, and I have been walking safely over the sea for many years. On the other hand, many dear ones have kept their jobs and professions. Eventually, there is no difference. The Lord takes care of both.

We must realize that today is still the period between the rejection of the Lord Jesus and the full coming of the kingdom. As we are following Him during this period, our living is in the

wilderness, and our way is on the sea. For both of these we need faith. Faith is not vain; faith is a reality. The Lord Jesus, the real One, is the object of our faith. We are in the wilderness, but the Lord Jesus is here. We are on the stormy sea, and the winds are contrary to us, but He is here. He is treading upon the waves, and they are all beneath His feet. So we have peace. We have peace by faith in the Lord Jesus, the One whom we realize as the object of our faith. This is the way to follow the Lord Jesus during this period. The period of His rejection began nineteen hundred years ago, and it continues today. We are still under the rejection of religion and the persecution of politics. We are in the wilderness, and we are on the sea following the Lord Jesus by faith. He provides our living, and He takes care of our safety. **What we need is living faith to go on with the Lord for the sake of His kingdom until the kingdom comes in full.**