

## THE REALITY OF THE KINGDOM (2)

*Scripture Reading: Matt. 6:1-34*

All the aspects of the reality of the kingdom mentioned in Matthew 5 are related to life. Our natural life simply cannot produce the six items of the inward condition and the three items of the outward state. By our natural birth we are dust, not salt. We become salt only by [regeneration](#). Once our nature is changed, our character is also changed. We become salt instead of dust because we have a new life. We have a new nature, a new element, and a new character by which we are the **salt of the earth**.

In addition, by the new life we are also the **light of the world**. John 1:4 says, “In Him was life, and the life was the light of men.” We are the light because we have the [life](#). If we did not have the divine life, we could never be the light. [We are the light of the world because we have received the divine life](#). The life is the light. To say that we are the light of the world means that we have the divine life.

When we read that the kingdom of the heavens requires surpassing righteousness, perhaps our thought is, “Who can do this?” However, at the end of Matthew 5 we are told that [we are the sons of our Father](#). This means [we have the Father’s life and nature](#). We are not adopted sons; we are sons born of the Father. Therefore, we have His life and nature (2 Pet. 1:4). There is perfection in His life, and we have His life. Our primary responsibility is to give the Father’s life every opportunity to develop within us. The developing will be the perfecting. If we allow the life within to be [developed](#), eventually the development of this life will be our [perfection](#). It is not a matter of our doing.

When I was in Christianity as a youth, I heard many sermons that quoted verses from Matthew 5. In every case they applied this chapter to the improvement of human behavior. But the requirements of the kingdom cannot be met by improved behavior. No matter how much we improve ourselves, we are still dust and not salt. [We can be salt only by receiving the life, nature, essence, and substance of God](#). When God’s divine life comes into us at the time of regeneration, we are transformed from dust into salt. Also, when we receive God’s life, we become the [light of the world](#).

In Matthew 5:20 the Lord Jesus mentioned the surpassing righteousness as a requirement for entering into the kingdom of the heavens. “Unless your righteousness surpasses that of the scribes and Pharisees, you shall by no means enter into the kingdom of the heavens.” This qualification of excelling righteousness is also the wedding garment mentioned in 22:11-14 and Revelation 19:8. According to Revelation 19, the bride will be clothed in fine linen, which is the righteousnesses of the saints. Three portions of the Word—Matthew 5:20; 22:11-12; and Revelation 19:8—all indicate one thing: in order for us to enter into the wedding feast during the millennial kingdom, [we need the surpassing righteousness](#). As we have already seen, this righteousness comes out of our enjoyment of Christ. When we received the Lord Jesus, He came into us and became our enjoyment. As we eat Him and enjoy Him day by day, He will have the opportunity to spread into our being and transform us. By this, Christ will be matured within us. This spreading and maturing of Christ within us will become the surpassing righteousness, the wedding garment, required for attending the wedding feast. To [receive Christ into us](#) qualifies us for **salvation**; to [have Christ matured within us](#) qualifies us for the **wedding feast**.

This corresponds to the concept of the kingdom that we have been emphasizing throughout this book. What is the kingdom? [It is simply the Lord Jesus coming into us and being matured in us until the kingdom comes in full](#). If we would not allow Him to mature within us, how can we be in the full coming of the kingdom? Christ is the seed of the kingdom. Although He has entered into us as the seed, He needs to grow in us and mature in us. If we give Him the opportunity to mature within us, we will certainly participate in the harvest, the full coming of the kingdom. The maturity of Christ within us is the surpassing righteousness and will also be the wedding garment qualifying us to attend the wedding feast. Receiving Christ into us qualifies us for salvation; allowing Christ to mature in us qualifies us for the wedding feast.

## THE PURITY OF THE CHILDREN OF THE KINGDOM

Now we come to Matthew 6, where we find the fourth aspect of the reality of the kingdom—the purity of the children of the kingdom in their good deeds. The children of the kingdom do good deeds, and in their deeds, there

is no **mixture, falsehood, hypocrisy, or pretension**. Rather, there is **purity, singleness, and simplicity**. In the kingdom life there is nothing pretentious, nothing false, and nothing hypocritical.

Here again we see the wisdom of the Lord Jesus. The purity of the children of the kingdom operates in three directions: **toward others in the giving of alms, toward God in prayer, and toward ourselves in fasting**. Concerning others, we need to **give alms to take care of their needs**. Concerning God, **we need to pray**, not for our interests and affairs, but, “Your kingdom come; Your will be done, as in heaven, so also on earth” (v. 10). This prayer is for God. In principle, the prayer of the children of the kingdom **should be something for God, to God, and with God**. Concerning fasting, we must **deal with the self**. Fasting is not related to sins or sinful things but to lawful things. It is lawful for us to eat and drink. These are our rights. Everyone who is born has the right to eat and drink. When we fast, we deal with ourselves by renouncing our rights. This does not mean we deal with ourselves because we are wrong, worldly, sinful, or fleshly. No! We simply want to be dealt with by sacrificing our rights. Toward others we give alms, toward God we pray, and toward ourselves we fast. These are the three categories of the good deeds of the children of the kingdom.

When we do these things, we need to be **pure and sincere**, not **hypocritical**. What is hypocrisy? The word hypocrite comes from the Greek word that means an **actor who is assuming another character**. According to the ancient custom among both the Greeks and the Romans, stage actors spoke through a large mask in order to increase the force of their voice. So, hypocrisy is an **outward falseness**. It indicates something **exaggerated and unreal**. It also implies to propagate with publicity. Both in the world and also in Christianity, nearly all the money is raised in the way of propagation.

When I was in a certain city, the brothers who lived there told me about the way a so-called church took to raise money. They would call a general meeting and present the need to the congregation. They would then ask for whoever could afford to give the largest amount to stand. The rich members, grasping an opportunity to display their wealth and generosity, would stand and offer a large amount of money. This method was very successful because it suited the fallen human nature.

In Matthew 6:3 the Lord said that when we give alms, we should not let our left hand know what our right hand is doing. This means we need to give in a **secret way**. This is absolutely contrary to the practice of Christianity. Some Christian groups even print reports showing the names of those who contributed the “love offerings.” In the years of 1933 and 1934, the church in Shanghai, the largest church in the Lord’s recovery in China, needed land on which to construct a meeting hall to seat five hundred people. At that time land was very expensive, and it was difficult to afford an adequate lot. The church needed property and prayed for it. In 1936 an elderly sister who was quite rich had some property very close to the meeting hall. This sister loved the Lord and attended most of the meetings. When she learned of the church’s need for such a piece of property, she had the desire to offer that land to the church. At the same time, however, she was concerned for some of her children. Eventually, she decided to offer the property to the church for one-half of its value, which was between \$25,000 and \$30,000. Thus, the transaction was completed with the church paying half this amount, and the title deed being transferred to the church. While the plans were being drawn for the hall, that sister’s daughter asked the church to include in the proposed meeting hall a stone with an inscription saying that the property for the building had been presented by the elderly sister for one-half its value. Brother Watchmen Nee absolutely refused to agree to this, and quite a negotiation followed. Brother Nee did not give one inch. He would never surrender an inch to such a show of human glory. The daughter of that elderly sister likewise would not budge an inch. Eventually, the deal was cancelled, with the title deed being returned to the family and the money being returned to the church. From 1936 until 1948, the church in Shanghai was not able to acquire a piece of land for a building. This caused the church to suffer. However, it was worthwhile for the church to suffer in this manner in order to keep the principle of the reality of the kingdom life in the matter of giving.

By relating to you this incident from our past history, you can see where we stand, and you can see the reality of the kingdom life in the matter of giving. **Never make a display of your giving**. This is why we do not like to reveal the amount of money people have offered to the church. In some of the cathedrals and church buildings, there are inscriptions indicating who donated certain objects. For example, a bench may have an inscription declaring who contributed it. This is a shame! If it were not for the American system of taxation, which allows for tax deductions on contributions, we would not permit the offerers to make their names known in any way. In all the years in China,

where there was a different method of taxation, we did not allow the saints to use personal checks for the offering. Everyone used currency. Thus, no one knew where the offerings came from. This is a good practice because it closes the door to the flesh and human vainglory.

The children of the kingdom must also have an inward purity concerning **prayer**. Sometimes you may be tempted to want others to hear when you are praying. It is wonderful to shout, “O Lord Jesus! Jesus is Lord!” However, do not intend for others to know that you are praying. In a sense, *it is better to hide your praying from others*. Never make a display of your prayer life.

Concerning fasting, the Lord Jesus said that the Pharisees and hypocrites disfigured their faces when they fasted as if to say, “Look at me. I’m fasting.” The Lord Jesus said, “When you fast, anoint your head and wash your face, so that you may not appear to men to be fasting” (vv. 17-18). *Whether in the giving of alms, in prayer, or in fasting, you should never make a show of your good deeds.*

## THE ATTITUDE OF THE CHILDREN OF THE KINGDOM

### TOWARD RICHES

#### Not Storing Up Riches

We continue with the fifth aspect of the reality of the kingdom—the attitude of the children of the kingdom of the heavens toward **mammon**, or **riches** (vv. 19-23). What should be the attitude of the children of the kingdom toward riches? **First** of all, *we should not store up for ourselves treasures upon the earth* (vv. 19-21). You may ask, “Are not savings accounts the storing up of treasures on earth?” It depends on your motive. There is nothing wrong with making some preparation for next year or for your children’s education. In fact, in the Epistles we are told that parents should store up something for their children (2 Cor. 12:14). We must educate them in a proper way, and this will be expensive. As parents, we are responsible to care for our children. This is not a matter of outward regulations. We all need to pray concerning these things. The Lord’s wisdom will then be with us, and we will be clear how much we should save for the future and for our children. If we are faithful to the Lord, He will show us what to do. The basic matter is to check our motive. The governing principle is that to store up treasures on earth is against God’s economy and expresses a kind of unbelief in His mercy and care. May the Lord’s wisdom be with us in this matter.

#### Not Serving Riches

The **second** aspect of the children of the kingdom toward riches is *not to serve both riches and God* (Matt. 6:24). Although we may have a savings account, we must not serve it as we would serve God. God, not money or riches, is the only master whom we should serve. We should serve God and nothing else.

#### Trusting Our Father for Our Living

The **third** point is that *we are trusting our Father for our living*. The children of the kingdom trust in their Father for their living even as the birds of the heaven and lilies of the field do (vv. 25-31). The Lord Jesus was wise. He used the birds to illustrate the Lord’s care for our eating and the lilies to illustrate the Lord’s care for our clothing. The Lord Jesus said, “Look at the birds of heaven. They do not sow nor reap nor gather into barns, yet your heavenly Father nourishes them” (v. 26). They have no field or barn, but so many servants are serving them. All the rich people serve the birds in the air. The birds enjoy what the rich people do for them. The rich people have a few barns, but the birds have many barns.

The Lord continued by saying, “Consider well the lilies of the field, how they grow. They do not toil, neither do they spin thread. But I tell you that not even Solomon in all his glory was clothed like one of these” (vv. 28-29). Who gave the lilies this clothing? God did. We should be like the birds of heaven and the lilies of the field, *trusting our Father in the heavens to take care of us*.

Some who are loose and lazy may find this suitable to their natural concept. They may say, “This is wonderful! There is no need for us to work. God will feed and clothe us. We are like the birds of heaven. There is no need for us to do anything. God will take care of us.” However, if they take this attitude, God will not take care of them. Never forget that there are some following verses. Matthew 6:33 says, “*But seek first His kingdom and His righteousness, and all these things will be added to you.*” *We must seek the kingdom*. We should not be **loose** or

lazy. When we seek first the kingdom of God and the righteousness of God, He will certainly take care of us. However, we must not be loose but serious in seeking God's kingdom and righteousness.

### CHRIST BEING THE KINGDOM

We have seen that the kingdom of God is simply another term for Christ. To seek the kingdom means to seek Christ. In the book of Philippians, we do not have such a term as the kingdom, but we do find a synonymous term—Christ. To seek the kingdom first actually means to seek Christ first. Moreover, we should not seek Christ in a superficial or general way but in the way of the kingdom life. What is the kingdom life? From the very beginning of the Bible, we see that with God's kingdom there are two aspects—image and dominion. God created man in His own image and gave man dominion over all things (Gen. 1:26-28). We have to see that image relates to the expression of God and dominion relates to the authority of God. In order for us to express God's image, we need God's authority. This is the kingdom. Christ is God's kingdom. With Christ we have both the image of God and the authority of God. If we mean business with Christ, He will be our expression and authority. When we have Christ, we have the kingdom. If we seek Christ first, God will take care of our needs. It is not a matter of giving up things and losing things; it is a matter of taking up Christ. People may ask us why we do not practice certain things. The best answer is to tell them we do not have time for such things. We are fully occupied. Also, we do not have any room. We do not have the space for anything else. As far as time and space are concerned, we are fully occupied with Christ. This should be our attitude.

As children of the kingdom, we should be pure in all our good deeds. Our attitude toward mammon, or riches, is that we do not serve it as we serve God and that we do not put our trust in it. Our trust is in our Father. He takes care of our needs. We need to concern ourselves with His kingdom and His righteousness. Both the kingdom and the righteousness are Christ Himself in a very experiential way. By Christ we are right with God, and we are right with others according to God. We need to experience Christ as our practical righteousness in being right with God and right with others according to God. This is Christ expressed through us. Christ is the kingdom, and Christ is righteousness. If we seek Christ as the kingdom and as righteousness, our Father in heaven will take care of our needs. Whatever we need will be added to us. This is marvelous! This is the reality of the kingdom life.

*(The Kingdom, Chapter 33)*