

THE REALITY OF THE KINGDOM (3)

Scripture Reading: Matt. 7:1-27; 12:36; 19:23-26

We have considered five aspects of the reality of the kingdom life: the **character** of the children of the kingdom, the **influence** of the children of the kingdom, the **righteousness** of the children of the kingdom, the **purity** of the children of the kingdom in their good deeds, and the **attitude** of the children of the kingdom toward mammon or riches. Now we come to the sixth aspect—the **principle of the children of the kingdom toward others**. This is the principle of how we deal with people and treat people.

NOT JUDGING OTHERS

The Lord's words in Matthew 7:1-12 are very clear. In order to have a proper relationship with others, we must observe one principle: **never judge others**. Judging includes **criticizing** and **gossiping**. **Even talking about a person is judging him**. It is very easy for believers as well as unbelievers to gossip. We simply like to know things about others and to talk about others. To avoid this, it is better not to know things about the saints. When I am invited into the homes of the brothers and sisters, I like to stay in the living room. I do not like to go into the kitchen or into the other rooms of the house. I like to be confined to the living room. Why? Because the more I see in a brother's house, the more I know about him, and the more material I have for gossiping. The best way to prevent gossip is to **stop collecting material**. If you want to extinguish a fire, the best way is to remove all the fuel. When there is no fuel, nothing can burn.

However, I have discovered a sorrowful and shameful thing: many of the dear saints are fond of knowing things about others. Once they go into another saint's home, they do their best to look into every room and even every corner. In this respect, there is no difference between Orientals and Westerners. Both are exactly the same, for we are all descendants of Adam. Our "feathers" are the same color. We all want to know things about other people. When we are invited into a home, we want to know what is in all the rooms. Although it is very difficult for some saints to recall how many chapters there are in the book of Matthew, it is easy for them to remember the things they saw in someone's room.

As a contrast to this, let me tell you of a brother, an eye specialist, in Shanghai, who had learned the lesson of life. When he knocked on a door, he would not enter, even if the door was open, until he was given permission. Once he had been invited in, he would not be seated until he was asked; and then he would not take any seat, but only the seat that was offered to him. Furthermore, he felt he had no right to look at things, pick up books, or go into the other rooms. Some of the saints, however, feel free to pick up books and open the drawers, the cupboards, and even the refrigerator. They seem to be the lord of that home. They assume the right to look into everything, to investigate, and to collect material for gossiping. **You must be clear that the more you know about others, the more you will gossip**. If you have gathered the material, you cannot escape from gossiping. What you have taken in will certainly come out. Do not take things in, and you will be able to avoid gossip.

Gossiping is simply another form of **judging**. Remember that you will be judged in the very way that you judge others. So it is better not to judge. And the best way not to judge is not to know. Learn to be ignorant of so many things. The best way is not to know anything about others. Then you will have nothing to talk about. You can honestly tell people that you do not know. Even when you do know something, **you should refuse to talk about it**. This is the proper way not to judge others.

IDLE WORDS

Matthew 12:36 says that we shall give account of every idle word in the day of judgment. All our **idle words** will be judged at that time. We should not think that after gossiping there is no further problem, for the Lord has said that **our idle words will be judged**. When I was young, before the invention of the tape recorder, I wondered as I read this verse how our every word could be recorded. Yet today even human beings have invented the tape recorder. There may be some kind of tapes in the heavens that have recorded all our speaking. We need to be careful. One day the Lord may say, "Listen to this tape of your conversation in the sisters' house." The best way not to judge is not to talk. I am sorrowful if I hear of rumors spreading among the saints. These rumors are due to talking, and the

talking is a kind of judgment. If you want to refrain from judging, **cease your idle talking**. Then you may ask me, “Brother, what shall we do with our mouth? God gave us two lips and a tongue. We have to use our mouth.” That is right. Whenever we come together, **we need to use our mouth to call upon the name of the Lord and to praise Him**. We need to **fellowship about the Lord’s grace**. We have many positive things to talk about. Why should we discuss negative and unprofitable things?

Do not criticize others or try to correct them. You may think that there is a little splinter in your brother’s eye, but you do not realize there is a beam in your eye (7:3). If you are going to remove that splinter, you must first realize that the source is in your own eye. If you remove the beam in your eye, you will find that the splinter in his eye is gone. The trouble is not with the eye of your brother; it is actually with your own eye. Therefore, do not try to pluck out the splinter from your brother’s eye, but remove the beam from your own eye; and you will find that the splinter in his eye has disappeared.

HAVING DISCERNMENT

If you are **loose** in speaking, you will **lose your discernment**. You will be unable to discern the right time to speak and the proper thing to say about the Lord. Because you have lost your discernment, you will give the holy things to the dogs and cast your pearls before the hogs (v. 6). You will be unable to detect the right times and the right persons with whom you should share the holy things of God. Some people are like dogs, and we should not give the holy things to them. Other people are like hogs, and we should not cast our pearls before them. What are the holy things? In Matthew 7:6 the holy things represent the truths of God. Every truth of God is a holy thing. The pearls represent our experiences of Christ. When we present the truth to people, **we need discernment**. We must discern what we should share and to what extent we should speak. If we are talkative, we will speak without discernment, without restriction, and we will present the holy things of God to the wrong person. We need to have discernment to recognize when there are dogs before us. At that time, we need to **exercise our spirit to restrict our talk**. We should realize that some people are hogs. We should not present our experiences of Christ to them. If we do, they will trample on them and cause a great deal of damage.

Now we can understand why the Lord Jesus connected this matter of discernment with the matter of judgment. If we know how to refrain from judging and how to exercise our spirit to have full control over our speaking, we will have the discernment to know the right person and the right time to share the truths of God and our experiences of Christ. **Having this discernment depends upon our exercise in refusing to judge**. We should never speak in a **critical, judging way** about other people or about other local churches.

PRAYER

Our talking is also related to another very important matter—the matter of **prayer**. In Matthew 7:7-8 the Lord said that if we ask, we will receive; that if we seek, we will find; that if we knock, it shall be opened to us. Asking, seeking, and knocking are linked with our judging. The Lord was indicating that a judging person cannot have a proper prayer life. **The more we judge or talk or gossip, the less we will be able to pray**. This is certain. On the contrary, the less we gossip and talk, the more we will pray. If, on the one hand, we would practice not talking, gossiping, or judging and, on the other hand, exercise the proper discernment in sharing the truths of God and the experiences of Christ with others, then we will be able to pray. First we ask; then we seek and knock. Sometimes asking is sufficient. At other times we need to seek and to knock. We may say that we ask for the Lord’s grace, **seek after the Lord’s person**, and **knock for the Lord’s presence**. It is easy to have the Lord’s grace, but it is difficult to have the Lord’s person and even more difficult to have the Lord’s presence.

A proper prayer life is linked to “Do not judge.” If we do not talk in a loose way and if we do not speak about God’s truths and our experiences of Christ in a careless way, we will have a **proper prayer life**. We will have the ground to ask, seek, and knock.

This section concludes with Matthew 7:12, which says, “Therefore all that you wish men would do to you, so also you do to them; for this is the law and the prophets.” This means that if we expect others to treat us in a particular way, **we should first treat them in that way**. Do not treat others differently from the way that you yourself expect to be treated. This is the principle. Be fair. If you want other people to treat you in a certain way, you should treat them in the same way.

BY HIS LIFE

We cannot fulfill any of these requirements by the life we received from our natural birth. [But by our new birth we have received the divine life that can fulfill all of them.](#) I am certain that the Lord Jesus in you will never be talkative. Whenever I see a sister gossiping or a brother talking excessively, I always shake my head because I realize that the Lord Jesus would never talk like that. Such gossiping surely is not the Lord. He will never gossip and talk that much. Praise the Lord! He is our life!

THE GROUNDS OF THE CHILDREN OF THE KINGDOM

Now we proceed to the last aspect of the kingdom life—the grounds of the children of the kingdom of the heavens for their walk and work (vv. 13-29). Please note that grounds is in the plural number. There is not only one ground but several. Our walk and behavior, our living and our work, must have a proper ground. Whatever we are and do must be solidly based upon a proper ground.

A Narrow Gate and a Constricted Way

The first ground is the **narrow gate** and the **constricted way** (vv. 13-14). Both the gate and the way are narrow. The King James Version of the Bible says that the gate is strait and that the way is narrow. In this verse, however, both words mean “narrow.” The difference is that the narrowness of the gate is rather short, and the narrowness of the way is quite long. The gate is narrow for just a short distance, but the way is narrow for a long distance. It may be easy to get in through the narrow gate, but it is difficult to walk the constricted way. The way is very constricted. We should not say that the gate is constricted, for the gate is narrow. The gate is not a matter of constriction; it is a matter of narrowness. The way, however, is a matter of constriction. In other words, the width of the gate and the width of the way are the same. The only difference is that with the gate there is no length, but with the way there is length. Both our gate and our way are narrow. According to our human concept, we may think that the gate at the beginning is narrow, but the way will broaden as we proceed. **But in the kingdom the whole way is narrow.** Will you take this way? Because the way is narrow, it is also constricted. While we are on this way, we have no possibility of changing lanes because there is only one lane. We cannot move from left to right or from right to left as we might on a freeway. Also, there is no way to overtake others. We must be patient. We should not attempt to overtake some who are in front of us; if we do, we will find ourselves out of the way. Although the way is narrow and constricted, it leads to life. In this verse life does not refer to the seed of the kingdom but to the harvest of the kingdom.

We have seen that there are two aspects of the kingdom: the **seed** and the **harvest**. [Both of these are Christ as our life. Christ is the seed of the kingdom as our life, and Christ will be the harvest of the kingdom as our life.](#) Concerning the seed, [we need the life to come into us](#), but concerning the harvest, [we need to enter into the life](#). In the Bible there are these two sides: the zoe life comes into us, and we enter into the zoe life. The zoe life has entered into everyone who believes in the Lord Jesus, but not all genuine believers will enter into the zoe life in the future. To have the zoe life **enter into us** means that we are [saved](#); to **enter into** the zoe life in the future means that we will [enter into the manifestation of the kingdom](#), into the wedding feast. [To have eternal life enter into us means that we have Christ as the seed, but to enter into the eternal life in the future means that we have Christ matured in us.](#) In Matthew 7:14 it is not a question of zoe life coming into us but of entering into the zoe life. What gate and what way lead us into the zoe life, into the harvest of the kingdom? Certainly it is the narrow gate and the constricted way.

Both the gate and the way are narrow. If you have ever experienced Christ in this way, you will realize how narrow it is. Although we need to be flexible, we should not be broad. Neither our gate nor our way is broad. The gate is narrow like the eye of a needle. In Matthew 19:24 the Lord Jesus used the example of a camel going through the eye of a needle to illustrate the narrowness of the gate leading into the harvest of the kingdom. Do you know how big you are by birth? You are at least as big as a camel. By birth you became a camel, and then you acquired a heavy load. This is the proper meaning of the Lord’s word in Matthew 19:24. We are camels by our natural birth, and the eye of the needle is the narrow gate for us to enter into the maturity of the kingdom. As camels we have been **fully loaded with worldly things**, making it impossible for us to pass through the eye of a needle. But the Lord can do it! [He can reduce us.](#) We all have experienced the Lord’s reducing. He has a way to do it. When you say, “Lord Jesus, I love You,” He replies, “I will reduce you. The more you love Me, the more you should be prepared for Me to reduce you. Then it will be easy for you to pass through the eye of a needle.” Regardless of how narrow

the gate may be, we can pass through easily after we are reduced. As the reduced ones, we can enter into the narrow gate and proceed along the constricted way. [This is the way that leads into the maturity of the kingdom, into the zoe life](#). The zoe life has already come into us, but now we are walking the constricted way to enter into the zoe life, into the harvest, into the maturity of the kingdom. This maturity of the kingdom is the full manifestation of the zoe life.

Many Christians claim to be right in certain matters. We should not listen to their claims but test them according to the narrow gate and the constricted way. Are they walking on a broad way? Do they find it easy to overtake others? Are they able to do whatever they like? If so, they are not on the constricted way leading to the harvest of the kingdom. Instead, they are on the broad way. **The broad gate and the broad way lead to destruction.** In Greek the word for destruction has two meanings: “**to perish or be lost**” and “**to be destroyed**.” Here it does not mean to perish or to be lost. It means to have all of your work destroyed. The same thought is found in Matthew 7:24-27, which mentions the house built upon the sand. When the rain descends from above, when the river rises, and when the winds blow, that house will be destroyed. You as a person will be preserved, but **your work will be destroyed**. This means that you yourself will be saved, but your work—all that you have accomplished after being saved—will be destroyed. The concept in these two verses does not relate to being saved or lost. To enter into life does not mean to be saved, because no unsaved person can enter through the narrow gate. **No unsaved person can ever walk the constricted way.** Everyone who passes through the narrow gate and walks the constricted way is a saved person. Rather, it means that after we are saved, we should consider our walk and our work. These matters will affect our future. If our work is destroyed, we will suffer a loss (1 Cor. 3:15). If our work is preserved, we will receive the reward of entering into the kingdom. To be saved is one thing, and to enter into the full enjoyment of the kingdom is another. This full enjoyment of the kingdom is signified by the wedding feast.

To be called is to be saved. However, whether or not we will be chosen, that is, qualified for the wedding feast, is still pending. **It depends on the gate that we enter and the way that we take.** If we enter the broad gate and walk the broad way, our work and walk will be destroyed, and we will miss the wedding feast. If we take the narrow gate and the constricted way, this will lead us into life, into the maturity of the zoe life, the harvest of the kingdom. Then we will enter the wedding feast.

Fruit of a Good Tree

The second ground of the children of the kingdom for their walk and work is the **fruit brought forth of a good tree** (vv. 15-20). In these verses there are grapes and figs and also thorns and thistles. These are from two sources. We have already seen that **thorns and thistles come from Satan**. In Genesis 3:18 Satan is revealed as the source of thorns and thistles. In the New Testament we see that [Christ as the very expression of God is the source of grapes and figs](#). These two sources are two lives. Satan is the source of the life that brings forth thorns and thistles. Christ as God’s expression is the source of the life that brings forth grapes and figs.

Never be deceived by teachings and practices. Check the fruits. The Fundamentalists may say that they are right, the Pentecostals may say that they are right, and the formal believers may say that they are right. We should not be influenced by their claims, but **consider their fruits**. Even if some of the local churches claim to be right, we should nevertheless check their fruits. It is absolutely not a matter of teachings or claims; it is a matter of fruits. The fruit is the ground. In order to know any person, group, or activity among today’s Christians, we must check the fruits. Appreciation must be based upon the ground of the fruits. We should not be impressed by how much people talk and teach and claim. We should consider the fruits. The Lord Jesus Himself told us clearly that there are two categories of fruits. The **false persons** would never admit that they are false; instead, they would claim to be right. Therefore, we should not be affected by what people say but consider the fruit. Even as we know a tree by its fruit, we should also know a work by its fruit. Only care for the fruit. If the local church in a certain place is proper, we will surely see the fruit. What is the fruit? [That is something of life which expresses itself as grapes and figs](#), not as thorns and thistles. We need to know a church, an individual, and a work by their fruits. The fruit is the ground.

The Will of God

The third ground is the **will of God**, not any works (Matt. 7:21-23). The day is coming when many will appear before the Lord and say, “Lord, Lord, was it not in Your name that we prophesied, and in Your name cast out demons, and in Your name did many works of power?” But the Lord will declare to them, “I never knew you.

Depart from Me, you workers of lawlessness.” (The same Greek word translated “knew” in Matthew 7:23 is rendered “allow” in Romans 7:15 by the King James Version: “That which I do, I allow not.”) This does not mean that he did not know but that he did not allow it. Here in Matthew 7:23 it is not that the Lord did not know them but that the Lord did not allow them to do those works. They prophesied, but the Lord never allowed them to prophesy. They cast out demons, but the Lord never allowed them to cast out demons in that way. They performed miracles, but the Lord never allowed them to do miracles in such a manner. **What the Lord wanted them to do was the will of God.** What is the will of God? It is the coming of the kingdom. “Your kingdom come; Your will be done, as in heaven, so also on earth” (6:10).

In the Epistles we are told that the will of God is the **Body life**. Romans 12:2 says that we should not be fashioned according to this age, but be transformed by the renewing of the mind that we may prove what the will of God is. **The will of God is unique—to have the church, the kingdom.** It is not a matter of prophesying, casting out demons, or performing miracles. It is a matter of having the church life and the kingdom.

It may not seem logical to say that a person who is not in the will of God could perform miracles. How could a person who is outside God’s will work miracles? Years ago I had the same thought. However, by experience I learned that people can do some miracles outside God’s will. Recently, I learned of a man who performed many miracles in the name of the Lord yet whose personal life was base and immoral. Now we can understand why the Lord will not deny the claims of people who will come to Him saying that they have done miracles in His name. The Lord will not deny their claims, but He will tell them that He never allowed them to do those things. Be careful! Do not think that as long as your prophecy is fulfilled, you are right. Do not think that the miracles you perform will justify you. Even the casting out of demons, in itself, will not be your justification. **The only justification available to us is to seek the kingdom, because the unique will of God is to have the kingdom.**

The Word of Christ

Now we come to the last ground, the **word of Christ as the rock**. **Our work must be according to the living word of Christ**, not according to the dead letter. The living word of Christ is the rock upon which we may build. If our work is built upon the word of Christ as the rock, it will stand when the rain descends, the floods come, and the winds blow. Otherwise, our work will be destroyed when it is tested from these three directions. The rains signify the tests from God; the floods signify the tests from man; and the winds signify the tests from Satan. Some testings come from God, others from man, and still others from Satan. **If our work is based upon the word of Christ as the rock, it will stand regardless of the tests.** The tests sent by God as the rain will not destroy that work. On the contrary, the more the rain descends, the stronger the work will become.

In Matthew 5 through 7 many aspects of the life of the kingdom people are covered by the Lord’s words. **May the Lord open our eyes to see and our hearts to receive.** However, we must realize that the Lord never intended for us to carry out these words in ourselves. These words are simply the revelation of the reality of the kingdom life. Our natural human life is inadequate. In Matthew 5 through 7 we see the living and the reality of the Lord Jesus as the divine life. After seeing this, we all must say, “Lord Jesus, You are the reality. You are the life for the reality of the kingdom. Your life satisfies the requirements of the kingdom. Lord, help me that I may open myself. Lord, come in day by day to nourish me, saturate me, possess me, transform me, and make me a part of Your maturity, to give me a share in the full manifestation of the kingdom.” Eventually, every aspect of the reality of the kingdom in these three chapters will be found in our lives. Our daily life and our work will correspond exactly to what is described in these chapters. **We will be in the reality of the kingdom, and we will even become the reality of the kingdom.**

(The Kingdom, Chapter 34)