

THE DEVELOPMENT OF GROWTH, TRANSFORMATION AND BUILDING

The revelation of God in the Bible follows a very important principle: what is mentioned in the beginning has as its consummation at the end. From the beginning of the Bible to the end, one line and one flow are revealed. Genesis 2 mentions the tree of life, and Revelation 22 likewise mentions the tree of life. Throughout the whole Bible, the main item that is revealed is life. Because the Bible begins with life, it also ends with life. **The New Testament is written in the same manner.** In Matthew there is the beginning, and in Revelation there is the completion. The seed is sown in Matthew, the sprout appears in Acts, the growth and blossoming of the fruit is seen in the Epistles, and the harvest takes place in Revelation.

We may apply this principle to the matters of growth, transformation, and building. The Lord Jesus as the seed has been sown into us so that He may **grow** in us, **transform** us, and **build** us up, all of which are aspects of the kingdom. The growth of Christ within us is the aspect of the kingdom. Transformation by life is also an aspect of the kingdom. According to our natural understanding and concept, the kingdom is merely an age, a period of time, or a realm. Although the New Testament meaning of the kingdom does include the concept of time and sphere, it means much more than this. Both time and sphere are included in the New Testament concept of the kingdom, but they are not the kingdom itself. They are not the reality of the kingdom. **The reality of the kingdom is Christ working Himself into us and spreading Himself through our being until maturity.** The kingdom began to come at the time of the Lord's sowing, and it continues to come gradually as He grows within us. When Christ within us reaches maturity, that will be the full coming, the full manifestation of the kingdom.

When John the Baptist proclaimed that the kingdom of the heavens had drawn near, the Lord Jesus Himself came. John did not say, "Behold, **the Messiah** has drawn near" or "Behold, **the Savior** has drawn near" or "The **Redeemer** has drawn near." Rather, he said, "Repent, for **the kingdom** of the heavens has drawn near" (Matt. 3:2). He proclaimed a kingdom, yet a person came. The Lord Jesus also charged His disciples, first the twelve and later the seventy, to preach the kingdom. **The disciples preached the living person of Christ.** This is strong proof that the kingdom revealed in Matthew is the living person of Christ.

A REVELATION OF THE KINGDOM

Matthew is not a book of mere stories or doctrines; it is a book giving us a revelation of the kingdom. The kingdom is the wonderful Christ who has been sown into us and who grows in us, transforming us until we reach maturity. Eventually, the time of harvest will come, and that will be the full manifestation of the kingdom. We must see this. We need to look at the book of Matthew from **a heavenly angle**, not from the angle of stories, doctrines, and teachings. If we look at Matthew from a heavenly angle, we will see that it reveals the Lord Jesus as the seed of

the kingdom, as the gradual growth of the kingdom, and as the full maturity of the kingdom. We must see Matthew from such a viewpoint. The New Testament reveals the Lord Jesus as the seed of the kingdom **sown** into people. When the seed grows within them, that is simply the **growth** of the kingdom. As He spreads within people, that is the **spreading** of the kingdom. One day He will be **matured** in so many who love Him. When the time of ripeness comes, that will be the time of harvest, the full **manifestation** of the kingdom.

THE SPREADING OF THE LORD JESUS

How can we prove that the kingdom is the spreading of the Lord Jesus? The strongest proof is found in Matthew 16:28, where He told His disciples **that some of them would not die before they saw the Son of Man coming in His kingdom**. The parallel verse in Mark 9:1 says, *"...until they see the kingdom of God having come in power."* Six days later He went up to the mountaintop with three of His disciples and was transfigured before them. The transfiguration of the Lord Jesus was His spreading. Jehovah-plus and God-Jehovah-plus indwelt the little Nazarene, Jesus. On the mountaintop, Jehovah-plus and God-plus shined out of the Nazarene. Peter was surprised and said, "Lord, it is good for us to be here" (Matt. 17:4). In a sense, Peter did not know how to respond. What we call the transfiguration was, in the Lord's words, **the coming of the kingdom of God**. The coming of the kingdom was the shining, the spreading, the release, and the overshadowing of the Lord Jesus. One day, when we experience the full coming of the kingdom, we will be surprised just as Peter was. We will not know what to say.

THE KINGDOM IN ROMANS

Now we need to consider some passages in the Epistles. Romans 14:17-18 shows us that the kingdom is present today and that the kingdom is simply the proper church life. According to some teachers, the kingdom has not yet come. They say that today is the dispensation of the church, and the next dispensation will be that of the kingdom. But Paul says that the "kingdom of God **is...**" (v. 17). He does not say that the kingdom of God shall be; he uses the present tense and says that the kingdom of God is. *"The kingdom of God **is** not eating and drinking, but righteousness and peace and joy in the Holy Spirit."*

He goes on in verse 18 to say, **"He who serves Christ** in this is well pleasing to God and approved by men." These verses reveal that **the kingdom is the serving of Christ**. To serve Christ is not mainly to do things for Christ; it is primarily to minister Christ to others. First, we experience Christ, and Christ becomes ours. Then we minister the Christ we have gained to others. This is what it means to serve Christ, and this serving of Christ is the kingdom...Have you ever noticed that in Romans there is the kingdom as the serving of Christ? Romans 14 presents a strategic point: the kingdom of God is the serving of Christ, the ministering of Christ, to others. Therefore, Romans also is a book on the kingdom.

FIRST CORINTHIANS

Many of those who have been involved in the Pentecostal or charismatic things say that 1 Corinthians is a book concerning speaking in tongues. They quote 1 Corinthians 14:18 where Paul says that he spoke with tongues more than all of them. From this they infer that we should all speak in tongues. No doubt there is such a verse in 1 Corinthians. But let us consider 1 Corinthians 4:17 and 20. Verse 17 says, *“As I teach everywhere **in every church.**”* If you read the context, you will see that this verse has nothing to do with speaking in tongues. Verse 20 says, *“**The kingdom of God is not in speech but in power.**”* If we put these two verses together and consider the context, we will realize that **the church is the kingdom of God**. In verse 17 Paul says, “Everywhere in every church”; in verse 20 he says, “The kingdom of God.” After referring to his teaching in every church, Paul says that the kingdom is not in speech but in power. Church and kingdom are used interchangeably, proving that the proper church life is the kingdom.

The situation of Christianity today is abnormal, making it difficult for us to see the real thing... Some teach that it is not necessary or possible to have the proper church today. Few know what the church is, and still fewer know that the church is the kingdom.

FEEDING FOR THE KINGDOM

Based upon this we come to 1 Corinthians 3. Of course, the word kingdom is not found in this chapter, but other verses in this book indicate that the church life is the kingdom (4:17, 20). First of all, Paul says, “I fed you” (KJV). In order to have the church as the kingdom, we need the feeding. Paul does not say, “I taught you”; he says, “I fed you.” We do not need the teaching; we need the feeding. We need to eat and drink. **Both the milk and the solid food mentioned in 3:2 are Christ**. He is our food. When Paul said, “I fed you with milk,” it means that he fed them with Christ. How we long to see the leading ones in all the local churches constantly feeding the younger ones with Christ.

Although Paul was a great teacher, he was also a wonderful **feeder**. He fed people with Christ. Paul goes on to say that he planted, Apollos watered, and God caused the growth (v. 6). Eventually, Paul said that by the grace given to him, he was a wise master builder (v. 10). Paul was a marvelous person: he was a feeder, a planter, and a builder. For God’s kingdom in the local churches today, we also need to **feed**, to plant, and to build. We need to **feed** people, and we need to sow the seed. **We need to plant vegetables that by growth and transformation will become minerals—gold, silver, and precious stones**. How could the plantation become minerals? The cultivated land is something of vegetables; the building is primarily of stones and minerals. How can we be both vegetables and minerals? The answer is **that the life which grows within us is a transforming life. It not only grows, but it also transforms**. While it grows, it

transforms, and **the more it grows, the more it transforms**. This life transforms us from vegetables to minerals.

Now we can see that Paul's concept in 1 Corinthians 3 is exactly the same as the Lord's concept in Matthew 13. As we have seen already, **the first four parables in Matthew 13 concern the vegetable life**. The seed grows, matures, and produces fine flour. **The next two parables concern the treasure and the pearl, representing transformed items**. Therefore, in Matthew 13 there are both growth and transformation. In 1 Corinthians 3 there is also growth and transformation. The concept is exactly the same. Following Matthew 13, the Lord told us that the stones are for the building. "You are a stone, and...I will build My church" (16:18, Gk.). In Matthew we see the growth with transformation to produce stones for the building. In Matthew all of this was in seed form and was somewhat undeveloped, but the growth and the blossoming of this seed in 1 Corinthians 3 is very clear. Paul planted, Apollos watered, and God caused the growth. Following the growth, there is transformation. While the plant grows, it is transformed into gold, silver, and precious stones to be the materials for God's building. Eventually, the planter becomes the feeder, and the feeder becomes the builder. The kingdom is a matter **of planting, feeding, watering, growing, transforming, and building**. Finally, Paul says, "You are the temple of God" (v. 16). This is not a Christian organization or religious society; this is the church, the kingdom. The kingdom is something that is planted, that grows, that is transformed, and that is built up into the very temple of God.