

## THE KINGDOM OF GOD sermons by Rev. George R. Fiddes

### Sermon 5 - ENTERING THE KINGDOM

Two background Scripture readings throw light on this aspect. The first, from 2 Chronicles, shows how those eligible to enter the Tabernacle and temple were listed by name. They were identified as being entitled to enter.

*In addition, they distributed to the males three years old or more whose names were in the genealogical records--all who would enter the temple of the LORD to perform the daily duties of their various tasks, according to their responsibilities and their divisions.*

The second, taken from the Sermon on the Mount, in Matthew 7, warns that not all are automatically awarded entry:

*By their fruit you will recognize them. Do people pick grapes from thorn bushes, or figs from thistles? Likewise every good tree bears good fruit, but a bad tree bears bad fruit. A good tree cannot bear bad fruit, and thus, by their fruit you will recognize them.*

*Not everyone who says to me, 'Lord, Lord,' will enter the kingdom of heaven, but only he who does the will of my Father who is in heaven. Many will say to me on that day, 'Lord, Lord, did we not prophesy in your name, and in your name drive out demons and perform many miracles?' (Matthew 7: 15 – 22)*

How does that apply where the Kingdom is concerned?

When talking to first communicants about joining the church and explaining to them what these sacraments mean, I am amazed at the variety of reasons people have for wanting to be part of the church. There are occasions when I have come across people who hold their vows very lightly, I still remember speaking to a lady who said she took what she wanted of the faith and ignored the rest of the teaching/demands of the church. Perhaps again this is symptomatic of the lack of respect that there is for authority or the demands of others or even the demands of God. Such a casual, indeterminate approach is totally out of place. A key question is: How do we enter?

There are certain requirements if we expect to enter the Kingdom of God.

1. There is the need for obedience to the will of God. We need to do what God calls us and commands us to do. It is not for us to pick and choose but to respond appropriately to the demands of God as stated in the Bible.

There is a story in Matt.21:28-32 about two sons who were asked to go and work in the vineyard. The first said yes but didn't go; the second said no, thought better of it, and then went. It was the one who did what his father had asked that pleased him. It is not enough to want to be a Christian, or claim to be a Christian. It is not enough to be religious, or to be affiliated to one church or another. What is required is that we hear the command of God to obey – to repent and believe.

There is a need to obey the gospel of Jesus. For example, the Thessalonians are told: *-your faith in God has become known everywhere. Therefore we do not need to say anything about it. They tell how you turned to God from idols to serve the living and true God, and to wait for his Son from heaven, whom he raised from the dead--Jesus, who rescues us from the coming wrath.* (1 Thessalonians 1:8)

In Romans, Paul says that *faith comes by hearing and hearing by the Word of Christ.* (Romans 10: 17.)

Equally, those who do not know God and do not obey the gospel of our Lord Jesus, will be punished: *He will punish those who do not know God and do not obey the gospel of our Lord Jesus. (2 Thess 1: 8.) And it is time for judgment to begin with the family of God; and if it begins with us, what will the outcome be for those who do not obey the gospel of God? (1 Peter 4:17)* The obedience is the obedience of faith; that we walk with God; that we obey Jesus and follow His teachings.

2. There is a need for repentance. There is a widespread misconception that the Gospel of Jesus Christ and the Kingdom of God are about people doing God a favour; that if people say they believe in Jesus and become a formal part of the church, then somehow or other they are doing God a great favour. They take eligibility for granted.

But, that is not the case. It is God through His Son Jesus the Messiah who has brought deliverance to our world and to us as individuals and it is only by repentance and belief (= total trust) that we benefit from it. Both John the Baptist and Jesus preached a message of repentance (Matt 3:1-2, Matt 4:17). That means a turning away from sin and going in the other direction. Paul tells in Galatians what will keep us out of heaven. *The acts of the sinful nature are obvious: sexual immorality, impurity and debauchery; idolatry and witchcraft; hatred, discord, jealousy, fits of rage, selfish ambition, dissensions, factions and envy; drunkenness, orgies, and the like. I warn you, as I did before, that those who live like this will not inherit the kingdom of God.*

Equally, trust in self righteousness disqualifies, as we read above in the Sermon on the Mount and Isaiah talks about *our righteousness being as filthy rags. (Isa 64: 6).*

Repentance is not easy or light. It is a major decision with serious consequences. It involves sacrifice – abandonment of the past; commitment – adherence to a new way of living; and endurance – pursuing that way *against the tide*, as it were.

3. There is a need for Sanctification with a higher standard to every aspect of life. This means to be holy; and to be holy as God is holy. This is not an airy fairy sort of notion but a real down to earth change in our hearts and in our lives. Sometimes folk will say to me that what I say is down to earth, but that is what the Christian faith is about, and it needs to be down to earth because we live in this world. God is in our world and there has to be a spirituality that starts in heaven and finishes here where we are. It is to be a sanctification that leads to a nobler character – i.e. we become more like Jesus, in our very nature and the qualities that we have.

And summing all these up, it becomes essential to realise that

4. It needs a new birth. Jesus said in John *you must be born again. (John 3: 7);* and in Matthew *become like a little child. (Matt:18:3)*

In order that we might depend on God and obey Him, we are to be born of water (natural) and the Spirit (regenerated by receiving the life of God through Christ) As a result we can say, like Paul in Galatians: *I no longer live, but Christ lives in me. The life I live in the body, I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me. (Galatians 2: 20.)*