

SEEK FIRST HIS KINGDOM AND HIS RIGHTEOUSNESS

By Robert Govett

[This tract is based on some of the writings by Robert Govett, M. A.. The New International Version translation of the Holy Scriptures is used throughout; and The Zondervan Parallel New Testament in Greek and English - (a Greek Interlinear) - is used for literal translations from the Greek into English. - Ed.]*

What Kingdom are Disciples of Christ to Seek? Is it the Kingdom of Grace? No! If we are Christians (Acts 11: 26), we are already in it! - "For he [the Father] has rescued us from the dominion of darkness and brought us into the kingdom of the Son he loves, in whom we have redemption, the forgiveness of sins" (Col. 1: 13).

Furthermore, the Lord in the Sermon on the Mount is primarily addressing Disciples (Matt. 5: 1,2): not unbelievers. He is addressing true members of His kingdom in mystery (Luke 17: 20,21): not the eternally lost. He is addressing those who have responded to the message of salvation by grace through faith in Him (Eph.2: 8,9).

What Kingdom then are DISCIPLES of Christ commanded by their Lord to seek? (Matt. 6: 33).

1. Disciples are commanded to seek an earthly Kingdom; one which has not yet been established by God (Luke 19: 11), and one which all Christians should now be praying for: "Your kingdom come, your will be done ON EARTH as it is in heaven" (Matt. 6: 9,10). It is not heaven itself, as the expression is frequently misinterpreted to mean, but a time when 'the God of heaven will set up a kingdom' on earth. It is a time still future, when Jesus shall rule upon the earth in righteousness and peace (Dan. 2: 44; Psalm 2: 8; 97: 1,2; Rev. 11: 15; Isa. 11: 4-9; Joel 3: 17, 21 etc.).
2. Disciples are commanded to seek a Kingdom into which only obedient Disciples will enter: "Not everyone who says to me, Lord, Lord," - [the hallmark of every regenerate believer (Rom. 10: 9)] - "will enter the kingdom of heaven" (Lit. 'the kingdom of the heavens' (Greek): a time on earth when the God of heaven establishes His kingdom, as foretold by His prophets: Isa. 11; Jer. 33: 9; Zech. 9: 10 etc.) "but only he who does the will of the Father" (Matt. 7: 21). That is, only those who have Christ's righteousness imputed to them, and have reached the required standard of active personal righteousness; will be allowed to enter into this Kingdom (Matt. 5:20). For this is the Millennial Kingdom of Messiah: the Kingdom of Reward for faithful service, and strict compliance to His commands.
3. Disciples are commanded to seek a Kingdom, which their Lord Jesus Christ has described as an "Age" (singular): "The people of this age marry and are given in marriage. But those who are

considered worthy of taking part in THAT AGE" (Luke 20: 35a). "That Age" cannot possibly refer to an eternal kingdom of God!

Every redeemed soul will enter into the eternal Kingdom of God, on the basis of the merits of Christ (John 3: 16); but not every redeemed soul will enter the age which will follow after this age - the 1,000 year reign of Christ (Messiah) upon earth; also described literally in Hebrews as : "a Sabbath-rest to the people of God" (Rev. 20: 4-6; Heb. 4: 9, 11).

4. Disciples are commanded to seek a Kingdom of Reward, for all those whom the Lord will 'consider worthy': "We boast about your perseverance and faith in all the persecutions and trials you are enduring. All this - [that is, your perseverance in suffering for righteousness sake, and for obedience to the Lord's commands] - is evidence that God's judgment is right, and as a result you will be counted worthy of the Kingdom of God, for which you are suffering . . ." (2 Thess. 1: 4,5; Acts 14: 22; 1 Pet. 2: 21; 3: 9b, etc.)

5. Disciples are commanded to seek a Kingdom, which is also described as a Prize to be won, and entered through a select resurrection: "I want to know Christ and the power of his resurrection - [a selective resurrection] - and the fellowship of sharing in his sufferings, becoming like him in his death, and so, somehow, to attain - [that is, 'to gain by effort'] - to the resurrection from the dead." - [Lit. 'the out resurrection, out from the dead,' (See the Greek): a select resurrection of believers.] - Not that I have already obtained all this, or have already been made perfect, but I press on to take hold of that for which Christ Jesus took hold of me. Brothers, I do not consider myself to have taken hold of it. But one thing I do: Forgetting what is behind and straining towards what is ahead, I press on towards the goal to win THE PRIZE for which God has called me heavenwards in Christ Jesus" (Phil. 3: 10-14).

Could it be possible for a regenerate person to imagine the Apostle Paul is teaching in this passage, that eternal salvation is a prize to be won through self-sacrifice for Christ? I sincerely hope not! Paul is teaching a select resurrection OUT FROM THE DEAD for overcomers. (cf. Rev. 2: 26; 3: 21). In fact his words here are like those of his Lord: "Those who are considered worthy of taking part in . . . the resurrection from the dead, - [Lit. 'the resurrection out from the dead', (Greek)]. This can only be a reference to the "first resurrection" of Rev. 20: 4-6; and the "better resurrection" of Heb. 11: 35 or "the resurrection of the righteous" ,Luke 14: 14. It is a select resurrection of reward.

Paul was concerned and fearful of losing the prize. He always occupied himself in making certain of winning it. His life was characterized as one of obedience, self-sacrifice, and total devotion to his Lord. In this passage, he is encouraging us to forget our past failures and 'press on' toward the goal to win the prize.

6. Disciples are commanded to seek a kingdom that is described as an inheritance.

Now all true Christians are children of God, and are presently in possession of 'eternal life': they therefore already have an eternal inheritance. Writing to the saints in Ephesus, the Apostle

says: "You also were included in Christ when you heard the word of truth, the gospel of your salvation. Having believed, you were marked in him with a seal, the promised Holy Spirit, who is a deposit guaranteeing our inheritance . . ." (Eph. 1: 13, 14). This guaranteed inheritance, based upon faith, cannot be lost: it is the gift of God to all of His redeemed people. In the book of Romans, we read that "God's gifts and his call are irrevocable", (Romans 11: 29). In other words they are beyond recall, unalterable.

But, in another letter, the same Apostle, writing to those whom he describes as: "holy and faithful brothers," we read of another inheritance: "Whatever you do work at it with all your heart, as working for the Lord, not for men, since you know that you will receive AN INHERITANCE from the Lord AS A REWARD" (Col. 3: 23, 24); and this inheritance the Apostle calls, "THE KINGDOM OF GOD": -

(a) "Do you not know that the wicked," - [(Greek) - 'unrighteous men of God.')] - "will not inherit the kingdom of God" (1Cor. 6: 9).

(b) Writing to "the churches in Galatia", the Apostle says: "I warn you, as I did before, that those who live like this," - [(Lit. Greek - 'the ones such things practicing')] - "will not INHERIT the Kingdom of God" (Gal. 5: 21).

(c) "For of this you can be sure: no immoral, impure or greedy person - such a man is an idolater - has any INHERITANCE in the kingdom of God" (Eph. 5: 5).

We understand from these warnings to "brothers" in the Churches, that Paul is reminding Disciples that entrance into the Lord's Millennial Kingdom is dependent upon their sanctification and active righteousness: "For three years I never stopped warning EACH OF YOU night and day with tears. Now I commit you to God and to the word of his grace, which can build you up and give you an inheritance among all those who are sanctified", (Acts 20: 31,32).

7. Disciples are commanded to seek a Kingdom for those who are rich in faith and love: "Has not God chosen those who are poor in the eyes of the world to be rich in faith and to inherit the kingdom he promised to those who love him" (James 2: 5).

Should we imagine that regenerate believers, who doggedly refuse to believe in a Millennial Kingdom of God upon this earth, will be 'considered worthy' of entrance into it? Surely, if we are rich in faith, we will believe His Word regarding this matter and act accordingly, (James 2: 17). Did He say: "If you love me, you will obey what I command?" Yes, most certainly! Did He say: "Remain in my love . . . if you obey my commands, you will remain in my love"? Yes! Then, as Disciples of His, we are expected to remember THIS command, and OBEY it, - "SEEK FIRST HIS KINGDOM and HIS RIGHTEOUSNESS" (Matt. 6: 33).

What righteousness are Disciples of Christ commanded to seek? Is it 'the righteousness of God' - the imputed righteousness of our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ? No! Most certainly it is not! If we are Christians we already have that! (Rom. 4: 11). The righteousness that every regenerate

believer is commanded to seek is (1) active obedience and strict compliance to His commands and principles which He has taught in His sermon on the mount; (2) it is to learn the practical, difficult lessons of holiness, and put them into practice; (3) it is a righteousness made possible only by the grace of God and the power of the Holy Spirit; (4) it is a righteousness which will distinguish all who practice it, from the ungodly, and worldly, carnal Christian; (5) it is righteousness that will be judged by a Righteous Judge, to decide who will gain admittance into the "Age" to come; (6) it is righteousness that will enable one to 'attain unto the out resurrection, out from the dead'; (7) it is righteousness that will enable some who are alive at the time, to escape the Great Tribulation (Luke 21: 36); and finally, (8) it is an active personal righteousness that will enable a regenerate believer to inherit the Millennial Kingdom of Christ.

Do you believe what the Holy Scriptures teach? I am not asking if you to believe me, or anyone else. I am asking you to believe the words of the Word of God. Here are some of His recorded words: "Do not be afraid of what you are about to suffer, I tell you, the devil will put some of you in prison to test you, and you will suffer persecution for ten days. Be faithful, even to the point of death, and I will Give YOU the crown of life" (Rev. 2: 10). I was told recently by another Christian that this "crown of life" was guaranteed to every believer! This is not what the text teaches. And again, - "To him who overcomes and does my will to the end, I will give authority over the nations", (Rev. 2: 26). And again, - "To him who overcomes, I will give the right to sit with me on my throne, just as I overcame and sat down with my Father on his throne. He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to THE CHURCHES", (Rev. 3: 21).

It has been pointed out that the Lord names overcomers in every one of His seven letters to the Churches, (Panton). What a remarkable encouragement and revelation is this fact, especially for those of us who have been overcome, and have failed Him so often in the past! If we repent, and honestly and genuinely seek His help and strength to obey His word, we also can be overcomers. Let's not allow ourselves to be side-tracked by those 'who consider reward to be beneath the notice of a CHRISTIAN.' Let's be like Paul and "press on toward the goal to win the prize . .".(Phil. 3:14)