

FRUIT OF THE KINGDOM

When God gave Moses the Law, He explicitly revealed His purpose in calling Israel. Exodus 19:5,6 states: “Now, if you obey My voice and keep My covenant, then you shall be My own possession among all the peoples, for the earth is Mine and you shall be to Me a *kingdom of priest* and a holy nation.” Israel was to serve the nations of the world as a kingdom of priests, but instead of serving as priest and being a holy nation, they did not obey God or keep His covenant. Instead they embraced the idol worship of the pagans and became a nation similar to all the nations around them and lost the distinction of being a kingdom of priests. The judgment of God upon the nation is seen in the words of Christ when he declared: “Therefore, I say to you, the *kingdom of God* will be taken away from you and given to a nation producing the *fruit* of it” (Matt. 21:43). This nation is identified by the Apostle Peter in I Peter 2:9,10 where he declared believers to be “a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people of God’s own possession, so that you may proclaim the excellencies of Him who has called you out of darkness into His marvelous light; for once you were not a people, but now you are the people of God; you had not received mercy, but now you have received mercy.” Believers have become the kingdom that was rejected by Israel.

Too often the subject of the kingdom is dismissed as something entirely in the future and is not given much attention by the elite who write commentaries, and those who teach theology. Yet the word *kingdom*, not to mention the many times it is used in the Old Testament, especially in prophecy, is used over 125 times by Jesus in the four gospels, and the word *church* is used only three times. Why has the church been so engrossed in building the church, and totally neglected the kingdom? To emphasize the kingdom in the future only is to miss the fact that kingdom people now must prepare for the future of the kingdom on earth. An example of this (unknown to most believers today, and neglected in most sermons) is in Paul’s admonition to the church in Corinth when he stated: “Does any one of you, when he has a case against his neighbor, dare go to law before the unrighteous and not before the saints? Or do you not know the saints will judge the world? If the world is to be judged by you, are you not competent to constitute the smallest law courts? Do you not know that we will judge angels? How much more matters of this life? (I Cor. 6:1-3). What the Apostle is saying is that the church should get in some practice concerning what they will be doing in the future.

David Bercot in his book *Will the Theologians Please Sit Down*, states an important point about Kingdom fruit. He writes: “When Christianity was young, the focus was on Jesus Christ and his kingdom, not theology. To be sure, there are fundamental doctrines that Christians have always considered essential to the faith. But somehow the things considered essential have grown from a few sentences to a long list of theological tenets, many of which were unknown to the early Christians. In the beginning, Christians understood that the essence of Christianity was an obedient love-faith relationship with Jesus Christ. This was not just any relationship, but a

relationship that produced genuine kingdom fruit. Christianity was a religion primarily of the poor and uneducated. There were no seminaries and no theological schools.

“But then something happened: Theologians took over the church. Once they took over, the emphasis was changed from kingdom to ‘orthodox’ theology. Before long, living a godly life often made people suspect you were a heretic. When Theologians came to power in the fourth century, the focus changed from ‘follow me’ to ‘study me.’ Learned theologians claimed to have special insight and understanding of Scripture. The rest of the church were expected to sit back and accept what the theologians told them what the Scriptures really meant. Bearing Kingdom fruit was no longer the important thing. The essential thing was to subscribe to the ‘correct’ doctrines. It was primarily the religious authorities who opposed the kingdom of God in Jesus’ day, and it has been that way ever since.”

Peter stated that the nation Jesus had predicted would bear the fruit of the kingdom (Matt. 21:43) is “a chosen race, a royal priesthood, and a holy nation” (I Pet. 2:9). This is exactly what God told Moses the people of Israel would be if they obeyed Him and kept the covenant (Ex. 19:5, 6). Their disobedience was the reason the Kingdom was taken from them. The first thing God told Moses Israel would be was “a kingdom of Priests.” Rev.1:6 affirms the believers are “a kingdom of priests.” The basic function of the priesthood is to offer sacrifices. The Hebrew writer brings his book to a conclusion by saying: “Through him then, let us continually offer up a *sacrifice of praise* to God that is *the fruit of our lips* that gives thanks to His name, and do not neglect doing good and *sharing*, for with such *sacrifices* God is well pleased” (Heb. 13:15, 16). Add to these two sacrifices Romans 12:1 “I urge you, brethren, by the mercies of God, to present your bodies a living and holy *sacrifice*, acceptable to God, which is your spiritual service of worship.” We name these three sacrifices “the fruit of the kingdom.”

THE SACRIFICE OF PRAISE, THE FRUIT OF OUR LIPS: The book of Psalms is the praise book of the Bible, and it gives us hundreds of reasons why praise is important. Psalm 92:1: “It is good to give thanks to the Lord and sing praises to Your name, O most high.” Psalm 147:1: “Praise the Lord! For it is good to sing praises to our God. For it is pleasant, praise is becoming.” The book of psalms concludes with six Psalms of Praise: Psalm 145-Psalms 150, with every verse in Psalm 150 saying: “Praise the Lord.”

Since most “praise” today is limited to the Sunday morning “worship service” we quote Daniel Schantz in an article on praise in the September 2001 issue of *The Christian Standard*: “Today’s church service is a Star Wars experience. A whole team of worship leaders wanders around a wire-infested platform, wearing headsets and staring at laptops. I guess I never realized how much help we need with worship. The baptistry is covered with a projection screen, the communion table is off to the side and there is no pulpit. A set of electronic drums sits where the pulpit used to be. Today my biggest challenge is how to tune out all the distractions on stage. Sometimes I even forget I am in church. These are just ordinary people, clumsily imitating their secular culture.”

The sacrifice of praise is expressed to God, not only in our speech but in our songs.

Many churches have established “praise teams” and “worship leaders” that are primarily concerned with and deals with music and singing. Music, singing and praise is not all there is to the worship of the church, but basically the music and songs sets the character of worship. The fact that modern youth get wildly excited in the world of discos and rock groups has not been overlooked by the modern preacher who thinks he is going to reach those who are the sons and daughters of the flower children, the hippies and the drop outs of the 60’s he must be “relevant”. The way to do this, he is told in the church growth seminars, and by professors training youth ministers, is to substitute pop music and guitars and drums for traditional hymns pianos, and organs. So, the battle rages between “contemporary” and “traditional” worship. Praise, sadly, then becomes not a duty, but a time of entertainment. We are a generation that would much rather be entertained than enlightened. So, the modern church has to give modern worshipers the same things they are accustomed to in the world. Should not the church offer something that can be found no other place in the world?

One of the commands in Scripture is to “teach and admonish one another” with our singing (Col. 3:16). This goes further than just being entertained. Yet there is more bad theology and false doctrine taught in our songs than by any other means. It may be entertaining and enjoyable to sing of “blessed trinities and fluttering angel’s wings, the land of corn and wine and camping in Canaan, of gardens and bells, the church in the valley, and the turning of prayer wheels, and how great it is going to be when we die and fly away or ‘raptured’ and get our mansion over there or a cabin in the corner of glory land,” but none of this could be seen as praising the holy God of the universe, and if this is what we are teaching in our songs, hymns and spiritual songs we are missing the point of worship and praise. The book of Hebrews suggests that praise and good works, not good feelings, should be the natural fruit of the kingdom.

THE SACRIFICE OF SHARING FOR WHICH GOD IS WELL PLEASED: Christ’s ministry was not confined to evangelism, as important as that was, he goes beyond that when he applies the words of Isaiah to his ministry: “The Spirit of the Lord is on me because He has anointed me to preach the gospel to the poor. He has sent me to proclaim release to the captives, and recovery of sight for the blind, to set free those that are downtrodden, to proclaim the favorable year of the Lord” (Luke 4:18,19). Hospitality and caring for the needy is a common theme throughout the Scriptures, both in the Old and New Testaments. The law made provision for the needy: Leviticus 19:9, 10: “Now when you reap the harvest of your land, you shall not reap to the very corners of your field, neither shall you gather the gleanings of your harvest. Nor shall you glean your vineyard, nor shall you gather the fallen fruit of your vineyard; you shall leave them for the needy and for the stranger. I am the Lord your God.” And Deuteronomy 24:20-22: “When you beat your olive tree, you shall not go over the boughs again; it shall be for the alien, for the orphan, and for the widow. When you gather the grapes of your vineyard, you shall not go over it again; it shall be for the alien, for the orphan, and for the widow.” The book of Ruth is an example of how this law worked. The book of Proverbs states it in these terms: “He who despises his neighbor sins, but happy is he who is gracious to the poor.” (14:21), “He who mocks the poor reproaches his Maker; He who rejoices at calamity will not

go unpunished.” (17:5), “He who shuts his ear to the cry of the poor will also cry himself and not be answered” (21:13).

The Christian’s responsibility to practice hospitality and care for the needy was not confined to believers but was extended to the world. “So then as we have opportunity, let us do good to all men, and especially to those who are of the household of faith” (Gal.6:10). “...and may the Lord cause you to increase and abound in love for one another, and for all men” (I Thess. 3:12). Christine Pohl writes in her book *Making Room*: “Offering hospitality in a world distorted by sin, injustice, and brokenness will rarely be easy. We need a combination of grace and wisdom. Substantial hospitality to strangers involves spiritual and more intuition, prayer and dependence on the Holy Spirit, the accumulated wisdom of tradition, and pragmatic assessment of each situation.” The epistles have much to say about practicing hospitality. Paul’s instruction to the Romans was “contributing to the needs of the saints, practicing hospitality” (Rom. 12:13). The Hebrew writer instructs his readers to “let love of the brethren continue. Do not neglect to show hospitality to strangers for by this some have entertained angels without knowing it” (Heb. 13:1, 2). The Apostle Paul was deeply committed to helping the poor (Gal. 2:10). Not long after his conversion there was a famine in all the world and the believers in Antioch “in proportion that any of the disciples had means, each of them determined to send a contribution for the relief of the brethren living in Judea, and this they did, sending it in charge of Barnabas and Saul to the elders” (Acts 11:29, 30). His final trip to Jerusalem, after his second missionary journey, which resulted in his arrest and later his voyage to Rome as a prisoner, was to take an offering from the Gentile Christians to the Jewish Christians (Acts 24:17). Paul’s instructions concerning this offering are recorded in II Corinthians 8 and 9.

THE SACRIFICE OF OUR BODIES, LIVING AND HOLY: Romans 12:1: “I urge you therefore, brethren, by the mercies of God, to present your bodies a living and holy sacrifice, acceptable to God, which is your spiritual *service*,” (some translations read “your spiritual service of worship),” but the phrase “of worship” is not in the original text). This means that true worship is not ritual performed on Sunday morning at 8:30 or 11:00 a.m. but rather worship is sacrificing one’s body a living and holy sacrifice to God in a daily walk with God, twenty-four hours a day. In warning the Corinthians about immorality the Apostle Paul declares: “Do you not know that your bodies are members of Christ...one who joins himself to the Lord is one spirit with him...do you not know that your body is a temple of the Holy Spirit who is in you, whom you have from God, and that you are not your own? For we have been bought with a price; therefore, glorify God in your body” (I Cor. 6:15,17, 20). On these passages we quote James D. G. Dunn in his work *The Theology of Paul the Apostle*: “What Paul is reminding the Corinthians was that *they themselves* were members of Christ, but themselves precisely as embodied beings, whose bodily engagements indicated the quality and commitment and discipleship. They were to offer themselves in their everyday living. This was the equivalent to Israel’s commitment to sacrifice.” Our bodies, then, are instruments in the service of Christ. There is such a close relationship between our bodies and the spirit, and the sins of the body touch the very springs of our spiritual lives (II Cor. 7:1). Our bodies must be subservient to our spirit.

As the completion of our salvation our bodies are to be redeemed at the appearing of Christ (Rom. 8:23). This is our hope.