

A BRIEF OUTLINE OF THE KINGDOM OF HEAVEN.

THE kingdom of heaven (or of the heavens) is shown in Scripture to be a sphere of privilege and blessing on earth, formed by the Word of God; and it took the place of Judaism on the rejection of Christ by His own nation. The expression is only found in Matthew's Gospel in the new testament. The kingdom of God relates to

another line of truth, so should not be confounded with the kingdom of heaven. We read, "All the prophets, and the law, prophesied until John" (Matt. xi. 13). John the Baptist was the last of the old testament prophets, and stood between two dispensations. His testimony was, "Repent ye, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand" (Matt. iii. 2). The former prophets had called on the nation of Israel to return to Jehovah and His law, as we read, "Remember ye the law of Moses, my servant, which I commanded unto him in Horeb, for all Israel, with the statutes and judgments" (Malachi iv. 4). John the Baptist spoke of the *new dispensation*, and did not re-call to the old one. The law was no longer God's testimony to man; for the kingdom of heaven was *at hand*—a dispensation to be established *on earth* by Christ. Those

who believed John's testimony were baptised with John's baptism unto repentance; and thus a company was formed from Israel, who, owning they had no goodness of their own, took this outside place, in order to be ready for the kingdom of heaven. John the Baptist's vigorous preaching, that the axe was laid to the root, and every tree that bringeth not forth good fruit would be hewn down, stirred many; and they were baptised, thus taking a low place before God. These were the excellent of the earth, in whom the man of Psalm xvi. found His delight (see verse 3). And we know *that* man was the blessed Lord Himself, and He joined that repentant company through baptism. John said, "I have need to be baptised of Thee, and comest Thou to me?" But Jesus said, "Thus it becometh us to fulfil all righteousness."

John's baptism only separated them from the nation who remained unrepentant, and did not introduce them into any sphere of blessing. They waited for that; and the Lord joining them, He became their leader, and they followed Him. However great John was, "for amongst them that are born of women there hath not risen a greater than John the Baptist"; yet we read, "he that is least in the kingdom of heaven is greater than he" (Matt. xi. 11). John was the immediate forerunner of Messiah, and even pointed Him out; saying, "Behold the Lamb of God" (John i. 36); but the least in the kingdom of heaven was positionally nearer to Messiah; for John was beheaded by Herod before the kingdom was set up in its present form; and so he never entered it. When John was cast into prison Jesus began to preach, and to

say, "Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand" (Matt. iv. 17). This testimony He confirmed by "healing all manner of disease among the people." On this, great multitudes followed Him; so He goes up into a mountain, and gives the principles of His kingdom, in what is called "the sermon on the mount," contained in chapters v. to vii., as Moses had done in a former dispensation, from Mount Sinai. From the days of John the Baptist, "the kingdom of heaven suffereth violence, and the violent take it by force" (Matt. xi. 12). This shows there was opposition to persons entering into this sphere of blessing on earth; and comparing Matt. xxiii. 13, we see it was the Pharisees who shut up the kingdom of heaven against men, neither going in themselves, nor suffering others to do so. Thus faith was

necessary to break through the opposition of the leaders of the people, and get to Him who was saying, "Come unto Me, all ye that labour, and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest." *His grace and their need* enabled them to break through the hindrances. The Lord gives the sign of Jonas, as applying to *Himself*, setting forth death and resurrection (Matt. xii. 40); then as to *the nation*, who rejected Him, they would sink into greater idolatry than ever before. The unclean spirit had gone out of the man; there were no idols in Israel when the Lord was on the earth; yet, at the latter end, the unclean spirit, with seven other spirits, making eight (a resurrection number), enter in and dwell there, that is, in the nation; and their last state of idolatry (which will be during Antichrist's reign) will be worse than any former state.

so shall it be to this wicked generation (Matt. xii. 43-45). This clears the way for the truth of Matt xiii., where the mysteries of the kingdom of heaven are set forth in six parables, giving the *forms* the kingdom would assume; then, subsequently four scenes, which are the *characteristics*. *Forms* are more the outward appearance, while *characteristics* are more the inward qualities. Had Christ been received as Messiah of Israel, of whom the prophets had spoken, then He would have crushed the Gentile Powers, as figured by the stone cut out without hands, which smote the image upon the feet and broke them to pieces, and then the kingdom set up that shall never be destroyed (Daniel ii. 34 and 44). This would be the kingdom of heaven *in power*; but as Christ was rejected it could only be in mysterious

form, allowing the Romans still to retain power. In Matt. xiii. 11, "It is given unto you (disciples) to know the mysteries of the kingdom of heaven, but to them (the unbelieving nation) it is not given." From Matt. xiii. 24 to 50 there are the six *forms* of the kingdom, viz. :—

The tares of the field, verses 24-30.

The grain of mustard seed, verse 31.

The leaven, verse 33.

Treasure hid in a field, verse 44.

A merchant man seeking goodly pearls, verse 45.

A net cast into the sea, verse 47.

The first three parables were spoken to the multitudes publicly; but the last three, only to His disciples, privately. Verse 36 says, "Then Jesus sent the multitudes away, and went into the house; and His disciples came unto Him, saying, Declare unto us the

parable of the tares of the field." He explains it in verses 37 to 43, and then gives the last three, which evidently have a more secret bearing. Let us look briefly at these parables, which set forth the forms the kingdom of heaven would assume. First, a man sowed good seed in his field, but his enemy came and sowed bad seed in the same field; this was to spoil the uniform appearance of the crop. The good seed is the Word, called "the word of the kingdom" (Matt. xiii. 19), and growing, produces "children of the kingdom." "The field is the world" (verse 38). The tares (or darnel) would be bad doctrine, and produce "children of the wicked one" (verse 38). These, too, would grow in the same field (the world), side by side with the children of the kingdom, and the field would contain this mixed

company of persons till the end. The enemy took advantage of the carelessness of the servants at the first, "while men slept" (verse 25), and the evil cannot be remedied till the Son of Man purges His kingdom. Note each line of the Lord's explanation:—

He that soweth "the good seed" is the Son of Man, verse 37.

The field is the world, verse 38.

The good seed are the children of the kingdom.

The tares "the children of the wicked one," verse 38.

The enemy that sowed them is the devil, verse 39.

The harvest is the end of the world (or age), verse 39.

The reapers are the angels, verse 39.

"The end of the world," correctly translated "end of the age" (see N.T.), refers to the close of the mysteries

of the kingdom, and establishment of it in power, which latter will last 1000 years, and which was spoken of by the prophets of the old testament. (See Psalm lxii. ; Isaiah xxxii).

The second parable is the grain of mustard seed, which grew into "a great tree." It is said, "A man took and sowed in his field" (verse 31). The field, all through this chapter, is "the world," and the testimony of Christianity, so small at first, like the seed, grew rapidly into the greatest among herbs, and *became* a great tree in the world (a tree, when used as a figure, sets forth power), and the birds of the air lodged in the branches of it, (compare verse 4-19, where we see that wicked spirits are meant, which lodge *to-day* in the midst of the mustard tree); for worldliness, politics, infidelity, and ritualism find a lodging, and rest

undisturbed in Christianity, which has become a great apostate power, and is no longer a little testimony against evil, as Christ and His apostles first established it.

The third parable is leaven permeating the three measures of meal. In Scripture leaven is a figure of evil doctrine, or evil practice, as the following passages show:—"Take heed, and beware of the leaven of the Pharisees and of the Sadducees" (Matt. xvi. 6). Then understood they how He bade them not beware of the leaven of bread, but of the doctrine of the Pharisees and Sadducees (Matt. xvi. 12). "Take heed, beware of the leaven of the Pharisees, and of the leaven of Herod" (Mark viii. 15). "Beware ye of the leaven of the Pharisees, which is hypocrisy" (Luke xii. 1). "A little leaven leaveneth the

whole lump. Purge out, therefore, the old leaven." "Neither with the leaven of malice and wickedness, but with the unleavened bread of sincerity and truth" (1 Cor. v. 6, 7, 8; also Gal. v. 9).

These show the Scriptural meaning of leaven when used as a figure. The woman is the secret agent for corruption, an evil spirit, putting secretly in the good meal the leaven of evil which would corrupt the whole. This is what has happened to Christianity; it is all corrupted; and there is no part of Christendom where the evil influence has not reached. This is the three-fold way the enemy has interfered with the testimony on the earth, spoiling all the outward appearance:—

Mingling, as in the wheat and tares.
Falsifying, as in the mustard seed.

Corrupting, as with the leaven in the meal.

The three remaining parables, set forth the more secret forms of the kingdom of heaven, and were only told to the disciples, as they are more particularly the Lord's own view; so, if we are to see the true meaning, we must stand with Him, as before we stood with the multitude. The *standpoint* makes the difference. The first of these three is, "Treasure hid in a field, the which when a man hath found he hideth, and for joy thereof goeth and selleth all that he hath, and buyeth that field" (Matt. xiii. 44). The man was the Lord Himself; the field was the world (see verse 38); but what was the treasure? All those who shall surround Him in His glory, and whom He redeemed to God with His blood. He

bought the world, for the treasure that was in it. What did He sell? All His rights as Messiah to Israel, as well as His rights as a man on the earth; for He gave His back to the smiters, and His cheeks to them that plucked off the hair, and hid not His face from shame and spitting (see Isaiah l. 6). Although Creator, yet He had not where to lay His head; and, finally, taking the Cross so as to be accursed, and going down into death, He bought the field, or world, which now is His by purchase; the result being, that at the name of Jesus every knee must bow, and every tongue confess Him Lord; either in the *day of grace*, for *blessing*; or, refusing this, in the *day of wrath*, with *judgment*. So the treasure is composed of all His redeemed of each dispensation, looked at as a whole; while in the next parable,

we see what is more special. "The kingdom of heaven is like unto a merchant man, seeking goodly pearls, who, when he had found one pearl of great price, went and sold all that he had, and bought it" (Matt. xiii. 45-46). This sets before us the heavenly company, called the Church, and the chief features are *unity*. So, we read, (one pearl), and *beauty* (great price), "Christ loved the Church, and gave Himself for it . . . that He might present it to Himself a glorious Church, without spot or wrinkle or any such thing; but that it should be holy and without blemish" (Eph. v. 25-27). Here we see the love of Christ for this heavenly company, which is composed of all saints in this *present dispensation*. The love of Christ for individual saints is true also, but is not seen here; for this relates to the company formed be-

tween Pentecost and the Lord's coming again when He will take them to the Father's house. This company meets Him in the air. When the Church is seen in heavenly glory, as displayed in the form of a city in government over the earth, it is seen to have twelve gates, and each gate is of *one pearl* (Rev. xxi. 21); so that every person who enters, and from whichever side, is reminded by the sight of the gate (one pearl) what this heavenly city is. Christ sees it all as one pearl, and He wishes others to see it as He sees it, to have His thoughts about it. So, wherever one enters, one is reminded of His thoughts at the first—one pearl of great price—and His thoughts are the same at the end, and every entrance is the abiding witness to it. The third of the three secret parables, which were only told to the disciples, was, "The king-

dom of heaven is like unto a net, which was cast into the sea, and gathered of every kind, which, when it was full, they drew to shore, and sat down, and gathered the good into vessels, but cast the bad away" (Matt. xiii. 47, 48). The net sets forth the means by which the fish are brought to shore. Jesus had said to His disciples, "Follow me, and I will make you fishers of men" (Matt. iv. 19). "Come ye after me, and I will make you to become fishers of men" (Mark i. 17). "Fear not; from henceforth thou shalt catch men" (Luke v. 10). These passages show clearly who the fishers and the fishes represent; and the net, the testimony thrown amongst all classes of persons; for it gathers of every kind; showing the influence the Gospel would have over men, both Jew and Gentile, drawing them out of their natural element

on to the shore. Here the fishermen sat down, and gathered the good into vessels—those really converted by the power of God in the Gospel, while those who were only affected, but remained unchanged, were put back into their natural element. The fishermen knew good fish, but they sat down, deliberate selection, no haste in saying they were good, or bad ; and those they returned they have no more to do with. The angels are the executors of judgment in these scenes which are before us. To sum up these last three parables :--

“ He buyeth that field,” verse 44 ;

“ He bought it ” (the pearl), verse 45 ;

“ The net gathered of every kind,”

verse 47.

These were the more secret forms of the kingdom of heaven, and only known to those who occupied the position of

the disciples; while the first three were outward appearances, that even the natural man might easily discern. The value of understanding these parables is seen in verse 52, "Therefore, every scribe which is instructed unto the kingdom of heaven, is like unto a man that is an householder, which bringeth forth out of his treasure things new and old."

The Lord having given six forms of the kingdom of heaven, He next gives four scenes, which present more its characteristics. They are found in—

Chap. xviii., the two debtors ;

Chap. xx., the labourers ;

Chap. xxii., the marriage of the king's son ;

Chap. xxv., the ten virgins.

Chap. xviii. sets forth God acting in grace towards the Jew who owed Him 10,000 talents, and forgiving him the

debt; but the forgiven one refuses forgiveness to one who owed 100 pence, and the king is wrath, and delivered him to the tormentors till he should pay all that was due to him. This figured the Jews deeply indebted to God, and who were forgiven nationally, so that Christ did not impute their trespasses unto them; but they forbade the same mercy to the Gentile, who did owe the Jews something like 100 pence, for they had treated them badly (see Psalm cxxix and cxxxvii.); but forbidding the apostles to speak unto the Gentiles, wrath has come upon them to the uttermost (1 Thes. ii. 16). So, now, nationally, they are in prison, and will have to remain under chastisement till after the great tribulation, which will take place during the time of Antichrist, after the Church has gone. This is the first great character of the

kingdom of heaven: the spirit of forgiveness in connection with things on the earth.

Chapter xx. is the parable of the labourers. The first of whom went into the vineyard under agreement, the others trusted to the honour of the householder. The first were under law (agreement), the last under grace, and the last became first; for the first in nature are the last in grace.

Chap. xxii., "The kingdom of heaven is like unto a certain king, which made a marriage for his son." In this we see that grace cannot be trifled with; for if grace reigns, it reigns through righteousness, and the one who thinks little of the occasion (*the marriage*), slights the necessary preparation, the wedding garment; but is found out before the marriage, and separated from the company who were suitably attired.

And now you get the fact, that grace slighted, can only result in the sorest judgment, "outer darkness," "weeping and gnashing of teeth."

Chap. xxv., "Then shall the kingdom of heaven be likened unto ten virgins, which took their lamps, and went forth to meet the bridegroom." Here the actual position of the kingdom of heaven is set forth. First, the time, "then;" it was after the Lord had left this world; next, "they went forth," out of Judaism to meet a returning bridegroom—they were virgins, that is, were not united to this world, but had hearts free in attachment to the absent, but returning, bridegroom. This departure, or going forth, was so strong that some not real were in the company. Their profession was the same, for they all had *lamps*; the outside was right, all professed to love the

Lord, but the foolish had no oil when they started—they thought the lamp of profession would do for the Lord, without the possession of the oil. Now, oil is a figure of the Holy Spirit, and is a characteristic of this Christian dispensation. Christ being away in heaven, the Holy Spirit is here on earth; and every true believer has the Holy Spirit dwelling in his body, as Scripture says, “What! know ye not that your body is the temple of the Holy Ghost?” (1 Cor. vi. 19.) The Holy Spirit dwells in the believer, and is a witness to the value of the blood. So, where the Holy Spirit is not, there the blood has not been applied, and such in the end are shut out; while the wise, who had oil in their vessels with their lamps, went in with the bridegroom, and the door was shut. The wise shut in, the foolish shut out!

The wise had slept part of the time, that is, forgot the return of the bridegroom; so the professing believers all went to sleep after the death of the apostles, and forgot all about the Lord's return; but at midnight, the cry was made, Behold the bridegroom; that is, the Spirit of God woke up professing believers to the fact of *His coming again*, and they are trimming their lamps; that is, cutting off that which hinders their light shining, such as worldly ways, and human opinions about Divine things, so as to be shining lights when He does come. The foolish feel the empty profession will not do if it is a question of meeting the Lord; and these say to the wise virgins, "give us of your oil," which the wise could not do; so, while they went to obtain the oil, *the bridegroom came*. All the real ones, who had oil, went in; the oil was

the proof of fitness—they had the Spirit of Christ—they were of Him; while the rest were all shut out. How important to be clear on this subject, and not trust in anything short of certainty, resting alone on the Word of God.

Thus the kingdom of heaven has these forms and characteristics, during the absence of Christ; but when He returns to take up His rights, with His sword girt upon His thigh, He will establish the kingdom of heaven, and put down all rule and all authority that is not of Himself. (See Psalm ii., xx., xxiv., lxxii., xciii., xcvi., xcix., ci., cx., cxlix.; Isaiah xi., xxxii., lxiii., lxv., lxvi.) These prominent Scriptures will suffice to show the importance of this subject. One has only to study the prophets to see how they all allude to it.

The expression, kingdom of heaven, is not found in the Epistles; because

the coming of the Holy Spirit to reside was another truth; and the *last truth* is always the *prominent one*; so we find the term *house* used, because the Spirit *resides*; but underneath it lies the truth of the kingdom of heaven. It is seen before the house is spoken of, and after the house, (as the dwelling-place of the Holy Ghost), has ceased; that is, the house in its widest aspect. To sum up, we see the kingdom of heaven is the place of privilege, testimony, and all blessing; outside of this sphere are Jews and heathen, where darkness reigns supreme. Peter had the keys of the kingdom of heaven given to him (Matt. xvi.), and he opened the door to Jews on the day of Pentecost (Acts ii. 41); and then to Gentiles (Acts x. 48); and those persons entered the new sphere on earth, leaving their old associations through baptism, which was a

figure of death. There are other blessings belonging to real believers, but they hardly come in the present subject, and enough may have been said to aid the study of the Scripture; for it is here that real profit comes in. As the apostle says, regarding another subject, "*Meditate on these things.*" May the Lord give His people a spiritual power for studying His Word, and meditating thereon, for His name's sake.

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