

Seek the Kingdom of God and His Will

Acts 1:1-11

Matthew 6:9-10

Today is the Ascension Sunday of the Lord. Last Thursday was the fortieth day after Easter. According to Acts 1, Christ our Lord ascended into heaven on that day. Christian churches have celebrated the following Sunday as Ascension Sunday of the Lord. For forty days after His resurrection, the Lord showed himself to the people and gave many convincing proofs that he was alive. During the forty days, He spoke about the kingdom of God.

The kingdom of God is the first and last theme of Jesus' sermons, and in these, he focused on His life. The Gospel of Matthew, chapter 5, records Jesus' teachings with the following account:

When Jesus saw the crowds, he went up on a mountainside and sat down. His disciples came to him, and he began to teach them, saying: "Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven." It was His first teaching on earth.

Today's sermon is the third in a series of sermons on the Lord's Prayer, continued from the last two Sundays. Today's topic is the Kingdom of God and His will. The Lord taught us to pray for the first petition in His prayer, "Your kingdom come, your will be done on earth as it is in heaven." I would like to share with you the message of the kingdom of God in three aspects.

First foremost, our goal of life is to enter the Kingdom of God.

Once a rich young man came up to Jesus and asked, "Teacher, what good thing must I do to get eternal life?" He was rich and young and had privilege, but he still needed to be filled in his heart. This, he believed, was to get assurance about eternal life. His was a good question. This question is the ultimate question, and the answer is in John 3:16: "Whoever believes in the Son shall not perish but have eternal life." The Kingdom of God is the eternal kingdom, and therein is eternal life.

From the period between 1910 up to 1945 there was a tremendous Christian movement in Korea. The missionaries from the United States fired up the Christian message to the people's heart in Korea who had lost their hope during this period on Japanese occupation over their country. Their lands, the sovereignty of people, the country and even their language were stolen by the Japanese conqueror. The people of Korea who lost their country and hope dropped into deep despair. At that time the missionaries of the United States came to Korea and fired up the ultimate hope among the people of Korea. The message of hope was the Kingdom of God.

There were two trends among the Korean peoples who heard the message of Kingdom of God. One who gave up this-worldly hope and pursued the other world after death, and another who found faith that the Kingdom of God will become manifest in the situation

of their lost country by the power of truth and justice of God. Their hope, through the Christian message, spread quickly to the people and brought the renaissance of Christianity into Korea. The Kingdom of God was their ultimate hope and energy that helped the people overcome any difficulty in life in this world. Through this message, their life became dynamic and their faith was empowered even in the midst of despair. The Christian message brought to Korea great change.

“The kingdom” seems to us an outdated idea. We live in a democratic society. We are no longer governed by a king or emperor. We are now also live in the philosophy of relativism. There is no absolute right and wrong in the world, there is only relatively right or wrong. There is no absolute norm or value in the world because we are changing. We live in a relativistic world.

All human beings are equal, so we do not approve absolute power or authority in our world. In our postmodern world, few people believe in moral absolutes anymore. We are told that each person has his or her own truth and the ultimate goal for everyone ought to be open-mindedness. However, there is a problem with such relativistic thought. The problem is that to look into an open mind may be to look into an empty mind; nothing is there.

Somewhere in life, absolute value should exist. There, absolute truth and ultimate goals should exist in life. There is absolute pitch in music; otherwise, every piano would be tuned differently. If there were no the North Pole which indicates the absolute axis of the coordinates in the sky, airplanes might lose their direction and collide in the sky. In Christian life, there is absolute and ultimate value to pursue, and that is the kingdom of God. The kingdom of God is the first and ultimate goal of life. If we lose the absolute direction of life, we will lose our life absolutely.

Second, the kingdom of God on earth is an invisible kingdom and continues everlasting.

Jesus taught the people that seeking what to eat, what to wear, and where to reside, which seems basic needs in human life, is not the issue to pursue. Rather, seek first the Kingdom of God and His righteousness. Then, the people became interested in the kingdom of God and asked, “Where is the kingdom of God?” Or “When will the kingdom of God come?” Or “How shall I enter the kingdom of God?” Or “Who will enter into the Kingdom of Heaven?” Or “Who is the greatest in the Kingdom of Heaven?”

Once, the Pharisees asked to Jesus when the kingdom of God would come. Jesus replied, “The kingdom of God does not come with your careful observation, nor come with people saying, ‘Here it is,’ or ‘there it is,’ because the kingdom of God is within you.”

How can we enter the kingdom of God? Jesus told Nicodemus, “I tell you the truth, no one can see the kingdom of God unless he is born again.” The kingdom of God is not the place we can see. Rather, it is an invisible place within us. The Kingdom of God is that

invisible kingdom in which the King our Lord rules. God rules the people of God by absolute Love and Justice. To fulfill His love and justice, God used the way of the cross for His people into His kingdom. According to Isaiah 53, Christ our Lord took the place of sinners, satisfied divine justice, and died the death we all deserved for our sins. As the Lamb of God who takes away the sins of the world, Jesus went freely and resolutely to Jerusalem to sacrifice Himself on the cross.

This invisible kingdom of God is related to the kingdom in heaven. For relationship between the life on earth and in heaven, Jesus said, "I tell you the truth, whatever you bind on earth will be bound in heaven, and whatever you loose on earth will be loosed in heaven." We are already in the realm of the kingdom of God by confessing the Christ our Lord. The living on earth is connected to the life eternal in the Kingdom of God. We shouldn't ignore life on earth as people of God. Rather, we are called to live positively in the invisible kingdom of God.

Thirdly, as you and I are already citizens of the kingdom of God, so we must keep the rule of the King!

Often, the gospel is presented simply as asking Jesus into our hearts, having our sins forgiven and receiving the assurance that were we to die tonight, we would "go to heave." The Christian life is then spelled out as reading our Bible, learning to pray, finding a church where Christ is preached and sharing our faith with others. Mostly people think salvation becomes either a past event "I got saved" or a future hope "one day I will go to heaven."

But, salvation at its core is our transfer from the kingdom of sin or evil into the kingdom of God. There, we live a grace-based life together in the power of the Spirit. The kingdom of God is the key point in Christian life. Now, we are ready for the most outrageous and surprising good news of all: The kingdom of God is within reach! God is establishing His justice and sovereign rule in this world to uphold His law and forgives, receive and transform sinners.

The Lord taught us to pray for the kingdom to come. In the Lord's Prayer, Jesus identified the kingdom as the will of God. The line, "Your kingdom come/Your will be done," this petition acknowledges that God is King; His heavenly kingdom fully manifests His will. But, we so often intend to keep our own will, to seek my purpose and to follow the pleasures of this world. That is not the attitude of the people of God, the King. Absolute submission to the King is our worship and due to the King.

As a rule of the kingdom of God, Jesus introduces us to the rule of blessing. This is the Golden Rule of God: Do to others first as you wish others to do to you. (Matthew 7:12) Those who care for others are cared for by God. That is the rule of God's blessing. Those who care about the kingdom of God are cared for by God in this world. Those who have much are responsible to use the much they have for others. These are rules we should follow and practice for the kingdom of God. God's will are absolute love, absolute peace and absolute justice in the world.

I read this fascinate story in American history. Many years ago, a young lawyer made a trip a New Orleans. He saw something happening there that broke his heart and turned his stomach – a slave auction. Slaves had been brought in by boat and were being sold to the highest bidders. The sights and sounds of that moment were locked forever in the mind of that young lawyer. Children were crying, women were screaming, men were struggling helplessly against their shackles as families were torn apart, the members probably never to see one another again. Human beings were being treated like animals. It was a cruel, sordid business, and as that young lawyer watched the ugliness and the inhumanity with tears in his eyes, he said, “This is wrong! Terribly wrong! And if I ever get a chance to strike a blow against this, I will do it with all my strength!”

Do you know who that young lawyer was? His name was Abraham Lincoln, and when in time his opportunity to right that wrong came, he stood tall and struck the blow for justice. A part of our calling as a church is to be the “conscience of society” and stand tall for social justice. Do you know which religious group was the first anti- slave action in America? It was not Baptist, it was not Presbyterian, it was not Evangelical, but it was Methodist. I’m very proud of the spiritual inheritance of Methodist in America.

Amos said, “But let justice roll on like a river, righteousness like a never-failing stream!” (Amos 5:24) The kingdom of God is ruled by the absolute justice of God. The Church is not an end in itself, however, it is the means to the end of extending the rule and reign of God throughout this planet and, ultimately, throughout the whole universe. It is our ultimate hope and prayer, “Thy kingdom come, thy will be done on earth as it is in heaven.”

We are called to worship our God, heavenly Father, the King majesty and to wait the King’s grace. Let’s rejoice in the King who rules our life. May God’s blessing be upon you while you live fully be submitted to Him.