

"It is your Father's good pleasure to give you the kingdom."

- Luke xii,32

"Come, ye blessed of my Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world."

- Matthew xxv,34

Isaiah li,7-16

Luke xii,22-34

Psalm 30

New Book of Worship, Psalm 30, p.50

These passages treat of judgment. In connection with the second passage this judgment is presented under three different images, the parables of the ten virgins, of the talents, and of the sheep and the goats.

Most people instinctively feel that when one dies, he immediately rises to life in the spiritual world, even though a belief almost universally prevails that the dead are not to be judged until the last day, which is understood to mean the end of the world. Of this time it is written, "And God shall wipe away all tears from their eyes; and there shall be no more death, neither sorrow, nor crying, neither shall there be any more pain: for the former things are passed away." Of course in the New Church we believe that the judgment takes place individually when we enter the spiritual world at death.

It would be difficult to find within the covers of the Bible a verse which carries within its terms greater consolation than is contained in this passage from Revelation. All the tears and sorrows, all the sicknesses and afflictions, and even death will pass away forever. And the Lord says, "It is your Father's good pleasure to give you the kingdom."

In the chapter from which these words are taken there are several warnings given. We are warned against hypocrisy; we are not to be fearful about provision for our natural needs; we must take care not to deny the Divine truth. And when one asked the Lord to speak to his brother that he divide the inheritance with him, the Lord replied, "Who made me a judge and divider over you... Take heed, and beware of covetousness."

The general teaching here is that temporal things and interests, if separated from the eternal, cannot profit a man, whatever may be their abundance and in whatever degree they may excite his delight. Rather we should in all things seek first the kingdom of God.

We are told that in this world we shall have tribulation, but this will come to an end. Tribulations belong to this world. The time will come when we shall leave these things behind. Each will go to his own place: like to like, kin to kin, drawn by the bonds of essential sympathies.

We are admonished, "Fear not." We should not have fear for our natural and

external needs. The Lord provides continually. It is the natural man in us that is subject to this fear. The spiritual man ought not to be subject to it.

Those who listened to the Lord when He taught must have been deeply impressed. He did not speak in abstractions, but made use of simple examples drawn from universal experience.

To the devout Jew life was not simple; it was highly complex and difficult. Obedience to the details of the law took much time and effort, and these details had been greatly added to by the "tradition of the elders." The Lord's unpopularity with the scribes and Pharisees was due largely to the fact that He swept away most of the ceremonies and rituals on which they depended for their influence. Nor was it merely a simplification of ritual that the Lord effected. The change He introduced was a real one; the way of life was simplified by His coming into the world.

Prior to the Advent the only contact possible between man and God had been by symbolism. But this method of approach was becoming ineffective through formalism, and contact with the Lord was in danger of being severed. And so the Lord cut a new way through. He took upon Himself a human nature, was born, and lived among men. This assumed nature He glorified and made Divine, afterward retaining it as a permanent part of Himself - the Divine Humanity - by which He is now able to be in touch with us on every plane of our being. The awesome remote Jehovah of the Old Testament has become the ever-present loving Heavenly Father of the New.

The idea that God can be approached as a Father is the central idea of true Christianity. Everyone knows something of the relationship between father and child. Many of us are fathers or mothers, and all of us are sons or daughters. We know something of the deep and sometimes irrational love of parents for their children - how parents will make sacrifices for their children, make excuses for their shortcomings, and sometimes defend them in their wrong-doings, however undeserving the child may be. This in a very inadequate way helps us to understand the Lord's love for us even though we do not deserve that love. He loves us because His very essence is love, and love seeks only to give itself to others without thought of any return.

So we read, "It is your Father's good pleasure to give you the kingdom." We do not make our children earn the hospitality of the home. What is ours is theirs. When they grow up, they may leave to make a home for themselves, and we do not attempt to hold them against their wishes, but the door will always be open to them whether they "deserve" it or not. Why? Because they are our children and we love them. This is true of parents everywhere.

The Lord recognized this fact when He said, "What man is there of you, whom if his son ask bread, will he give him a stone?" Very well, then, "If ye then,

being evil, know how to give good gifts unto your children, how much more shall your Father which is in heaven give good things to them that ask him?" So we are commanded, "Ask, and it shall be given you; seek, and ye shall find; knock, and it shall be opened unto you: For every one that asketh receiveth; and he that seeketh findeth; and to him that knocketh it shall be opened."

Our Heavenly Father longs to give good gifts to all His children - full measure, pressed down, and running over - to each according to his ability to receive, and according to his need. No one is ever outside of His care. His love extends even to the hells. "Whither shall I go from thy spirit? or whither shall I flee from thy presence? If I ascend up into heaven, thou art there: if I make my bed in hell, behold, thou art there." A good parent spends more time and effort on the child who is sick or handicapped. Why? Because of the need. So the Lord's love went out to the oppressed, to the outcasts, to the fallen, to the thief on the cross, to all who turned to Him for help.

But we must ask the Lord for the blessings that He is longing to give us. If we don't, we cannot have them, because by not asking for them we shut them out. Then, does not such a doctrine make things too easy for us? Is all we have to do to ask? What about the need of shunning evils as sins and keeping the commandments? Recall the story of the prodigal son. He did not want to stay in his father's household. He wanted to be as far away from home as possible. And he felt no need of help until he recognized his true condition. Just because our Heavenly Father recognizes us as His children, it does not mean that we necessarily acknowledge Him as our Father. We need not only to recognize and acknowledge the Lord as our Father but also to recognize and acknowledge our own sinfulness, and to return home. Otherwise we shall not approach Him and ask for His blessing.

There are various things which separate us from Him - the love of the world, the love of having our own way. Pride, self-sufficiency, and materialism may more effectively cut us off from Him than the more obvious and grosser sins. So the Lord said to the Pharisees that the publicans and harlots would get into the kingdom of heaven before they would. The most hopeless are those who are so wrapped up in self that they will not accept heaven as a free gift from the Lord.

There may be many barriers keeping us from receiving life from Him, but He will break them down if we ask Him to do so. There is nothing that He will not readily do for us if we really want it done. The trouble is that we so often do not want it. We may think that we do, but we don't! We pray to Him to remove our sins, but cling to them more tightly. We pray to be brought to Him, but turn away when we get near. Hence all the pain and suffering and wars, whereas if we really wanted to be free from these things, we could enter the kingdom of heaven, for the door is never shut.

Our text should not be interpreted as a downy pillow on which we can rest and take our ease. but it does reveal to us the loving kindness and mercy of the Lord. We cannot attain the kingdom of heaven by our own strength. Those who receive it acknowledge this. They know too well that it is through no virtue or grace of their own that they enjoy it. But the Lord is love itself, and created us solely that He might bless us in this life here and in heaven to all eternity. To all who look to Him and seek to do His will He says: "Fear not, little flock; for it is your Father's good pleasure to give you the kingdom."

Amen