

(Church Life) Distinctives of Christ's Kingdom

by Mose Stoltzfus

The sermon emphasizes the importance of embracing the teachings of Christ and living a life of humility, meekness, and pursuit of righteousness, as opposed to relying on human effort and failing to accept persecution and suffering for righteousness' sake.

Duration: 1:03:20

Scripture: Matthew 5:3-5, Matthew 5:17, Matthew 5:22, Matthew 10:35-37, Matthew 12:46-50, John 1:17

Topics: "Kingdom Living", "Spiritual Poverty"

Description

In this sermon, the preacher emphasizes the importance of following the teachings of Jesus as outlined in the Sermon on the Mount. He highlights the shift in theology that occurred when Jesus began his earthly ministry, reaching out to the lowly and marginalized. The preacher also discusses the significance of being poor in spirit and mourning as a paradigm shift in humanity. He emphasizes the need for love and the presence of the Lord Jesus in our lives, warning against getting caught up in conflicts and consuming our time without making progress. Additionally, the preacher briefly touches on the topic of entering the kingdom of God, emphasizing the importance of responding to the gospel and allowing God to work in our hearts.

Transcript

Hello, this is Brother Denny. Welcome to Charity Ministries. Our desire is that your life would be blessed and changed by this message.

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Beloved brethren, I just love the fellowship. It is sweet to every two years and many times in between for myself also and traveling to other places and meetings and church planning work. It is so wonderful to see the body of Christ on a bigger scale than just our local congregation and that is what we have here today represented.

It seems like sometimes we find our hearts growing cold toward each other when we just don't fellowship or don't see each other, you know, but when we have that acquaintance, then that all warms up. Praise God for that. All right, shall we bow our heads for prayer? Oh, God, thank you for the centrality of Christ.

Thank you for the entrance into the kingdom through Christ. Thank you, dear God, for sanctification through Christ. Oh, thank you, dear God, for being our head and guiding us through this dark world and helping us attain unto eternal life.

Oh, Father, we have that blessed hope and glorious appearing of our God and Savior Jesus Christ that we look forward to when the fight will be over. We can lay down the battle lines and enjoy the glories of heaven for all eternity. Thank you, dear God, for all the things that happened last night as men heard the gospel preached and then responded in their own hearts.

And we pray that much more work, God, would be done in all of our hearts together to make us what you want us to be. We pray again, break the bread of life today and watch over the things we say that we may say those things which are truth and right. We pray in Jesus' name, amen.

Yeah, just a couple of things here that I would like to mention. I have enjoyed some very interesting conversations and questions that have come my way since yesterday. One of them is a brother came to me and I just thought I would clarify that.

When I preached that out of Daniel 2 on the stone cut out of the mountain, smiting the image at the feet, I want you to notice that Jesus Christ came in the Roman Empire. Christ was cut out of the mountain and hit the image during the Roman Empire. That was the beginning of the crumbling of the four world kingdoms, although his ultimate end is down at the toes when the Antichrist kingdom will be destroyed.

But I just wanted to make sure you have that picture correct, that the stone hits the image in the Roman Empire first at the feet and the image begins to fall apart and a new kingdom and a new dominion, which is that of Jesus Christ and him crucified in his church, begins and continues until it reigns triumphantly. Another thing that has been interesting to me is the subject of the hybrid, a hybrid church. And I would very much encourage your study of that, very deep study, that you determine basically while you're here as to whether you're a part of a true church of Jesus Christ or part of a hybrid.

I believe that is important. Someone even asked whether I would list or give a list of the hybrid churches, which is impossible. I'm sure you know, but I did want to give you a few more examples.

I myself come from the Old Oral Amish, was born and raised among the Old Oral Horsesnbuggy Amish, and that is the epitome of a hybrid church. They believe in baptism and communion and church membership and they believe in Christ, they believe that Christ came 2,000 years ago and all that, but they are a hybrid church because they even have come so far in the last generation, especially that they consider converted people to have a strange belief and will excommunicate them out of the church, not all of them nationwide, but here locally they will excommunicate you out of the church for this strange belief or for being converted or for having Bible studies and prayer meetings or for having assurance of salvation. And so they are so much a hybrid church that they are over on the work side.

Basically what they say is we need the grace of God, we need to do the best we can and God's grace will cover the rest. So the emphasis is on human attempt to live a godly life and not through the power of the Holy Spirit. Well, those kind of things and many others, I could mention the Hutterites likewise, where they

have taken the gospel and brought it into the ark of God is the church, which is the living communally.

So if you don't live communally, you're not in the ark and therefore not in the church. And it's just amazing the ignorance of those people. We were talking to an old grandma in southern Alberta one time and it was just the epitome again of the Hutterite history there.

And like I say, there again you have many variations of people who wouldn't take it that far. But we got in the conversation, well, if the colony is the ark, what are the people supposed to do in California? And she in a curt word just let us know there is absolutely no hope for anybody down there if they don't live communally, you know. And that's the way these poor people believe and are deceived.

And there are many hybrids and you know them. But what Leonard Verdine does in his book on the anatomy of a hybrid is to show how men actually have attempted to come back out of the Catholic church and to redo and revive the church. But they have done that without centering on Christ and His Word.

And so they have made a lot of corrections and there was some fresh breath of air that a lot of these hybrids brought. But they are a hybrid because they would not submit themselves fully and completely to the obedience of the Word of God. And that basically produces a hybrid.

And I've had numerous people come to me here and testify that they were part of a hybrid church and why they were and just sharing with me those things. And that was very interesting. I wish you could all hear some of those testimonies.

But this morning I'd like to go into a message on the distinctive of the kingdom, of Christ's church or Christ's kingdom. I think the title for the CD will be Distinctives of Christ's Kingdom. I return our Bibles to Matthew chapter 5. And I would just like to emphasize that here again we have the anatomy of a hybrid popping up very, very quickly.

To those who may believe that the Sermon on the Mount is relegated to another age. If you believe that and do not begin to see the paradigm shift that is made between the Testaments here and the Old Testament is based on the old law. The law came by Moses but grace and truth by Jesus Christ.

And that division takes place basically in Matthew chapter 5 as we have the unfolding of all at once a brand new teaching and philosophy of life. Or reality of life is a better word. And that's what we want to look at.

And if you belong to a theology or theological persuasion that does not embrace the Sermon on the Mount, then you're in trouble with your church or with your theology. Because I actually believe that the warnings given of beware of false prophets in the book of Matthew is a warning of men who will not teach this doctrine and this truth that Jesus brought. This shift, this change.

It has been said, but I say unto you, ye have heard of old, but now this is the way. And Jesus Christ brought that change about when He came to earth and began to sit down and teach the people this new teaching. And the Sermon on the Mount is a broad compilation of those teachings and very, very important to those who are the hybrids that we identified yesterday.

They go back and they take the Old Testament. And what burdens me the worst there is not that there are not many good and right principles of God and teaching that are compatible with the teachings of Christ in the Old Testament, such as the Psalms and Proverbs and even the law is brought over and fulfilled in two

commandments. You know, and we have all of that.

However, men who go back and pick and choose out of the old Mosaic law and bring it over and have it brought to bear upon your conscience that you can't even live right or free because of Old Testament law being brought over into the new covenant, that's a hybrid. It produces a hybrid and will not come out right. And what they always do is pick and choose.

Nobody will not light a fire on the Sabbath day, on Saturday, as was commanded under the old law. Hardly anyone will take it to that extent, but yet they pick and choose. But the Bible says, if you do not keep everything, you're guilty of it all.

And so it's very important that you understand what Jesus was doing in Matthew chapter 5. Let us begin to read here in some of the distinctives of the kingdom. And I'm going to abbreviate this a lot because I do need to be moving on. Again, we are talking of the kingdom of God, the kingdom of Christ, or the church of Jesus Christ interchangeably here.

Because we believe here's where the shift took place and Christ started to build His church and build His kingdom. And that is what we are in yet today. In 2008, we are in the kingdom of Christ.

The kingdom of God is excellent and alive and well among the remnant of God's people across the face of the earth. And they are those which believe the practical issues of the teachings of the Lord Jesus Christ. First of all, you bring His centrality, as Brother Denny preached here this morning, and you have a living experience with the Lord Jesus in a conversion.

And then you follow the word of God and allow it to instruct you in the ways of God into sanctification and true holiness. It is truly a holy nation, a peculiar people that are zealous of good works. All right, Matthew chapter 5. Here we have the change taking place where we have the word in verse 1. We have in seeing the multitudes He went up into a mountain.

And when He was set, His disciples came unto Him, and He opened His mouth and taught them, saying, Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven. Now, humility is taught in the Old Testament to a degree, but this is a drastic change. To see that the poor in spirit are addressed in a specific way this way, and theirs is the kingdom of heaven, that the way in or the entrance into the kingdom of God is always closer and quicker to the poor in spirit than to anybody else on earth.

When we see ourselves as a sinner, and we see our need of a Savior, and our proud and arrogant and boastful spirit begins to collapse, and we come before the Lord and recognize that I am a needy man, we are close to the kingdom of God. And that's the way this whole thing is laid out this way. The poor in spirit, theirs is the kingdom of heaven.

Yes, the kingdom of heaven. And then in verse 4 it says, Blessed are they that mourn, for they shall be comforted. And you just get the picture, wow, this is strange.

We're now looking for men who mourn. Mourn over what? Mourn over their need, mourn over their sin, mourn in repentance before God. And are beginning to say, whoa, wait a minute, how am I living, what am I doing, I'm not going the right direction, I need help, I need somebody.

A supernatural help and power and grace like the man who tried and tried to stop drinking, stop smoking, stop adultery and all that. And he finally just comes to the end and said, I can't quit, help, I need help. And

that's what he did, and he begins to be poor in spirit, and he begins to mourn.

And that is the great paradigm shift that the Sermon on the Mount brings to humanity. When Jesus started his earthly ministry, he lived obediently under the law and worked in the carpenter's shop up to 30 years of age. But when he sat down and began to teach the people, you have a major shift in theology that is brought to the people.

Back in the Old Testament, it seemed like many times it was the rich and the famous and, you know, the Abrahams and men like that, the Isaacs and Jacob, the patriarchs that were the men of God and all that. But here you reach down to the slave, you reach down to the lowly, you reach down to the hungry and the thirsty, and that is brought here. Also, we have in verse 5, blessed are the meek.

Look at that. Blessed are the meek, they shall inherit the earth. Blessed are they which do hunger and thirst after righteousness, for they shall be filled.

Blessed are the merciful, for they shall obtain mercy. And it just brings everything as a lowly, simple life of reality at the foot of the cross. And there we become poor in spirit, and we become meek and mild and needy, and we hunger and thirst after God, and there is the new kingdom opening up to humanity.

And the church of Jesus Christ is based on that doctrine and on that experience. Peacemakers we have mentioned there too. And then we go on into verse 10, and we have, blessed are they which are persecuted for righteousness' sake, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.

And there again we have, you know, in the Old Testament, and this is why we just cannot accept the theology of a flat Bible, is because in the Old Testament, if an army come against you, and somebody destroyed your city by night and gave you a problem, you know, you rallied your men together and went and fought back the next day. And that's the theme throughout the Old Testament, by and large through the Chronicles and Kings and Judges and many of the Old Testament books that are given like that. But here it's very different.

Now we accept persecution, we accept a misunderstanding, we accept the cross upon our lives, we accept the fact which Jesus was a perfect example of. And we do that all without fighting back and to be non-resistant and love our enemies. And we have all those things here which we want to just mention.

I received a very interesting phone call the other night. A man living out in central Pennsylvania somewhere went out on a cold winter night to his phone channel and called me up, and we talked for quite a while. And one of the things he said, My, you fellas in there, you have quite a bad reputation.

And I forget what he said. Do you realize what people are saying? You know what, you really have some reputation. But yet the man had come to the light and gotten born again, and he wanted to talk for quite a while because it seemed like he also was coming to this point where he saw that perhaps those are the people that might be able to help me or might have the light that I would like to be a part of.

And that is the way we should accept that. Woe is us when all men speak well of us. And we should be able to accept that like the Scripture says here, Blessed are they which are persecuted for righteousness' sake, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.

Blessed are ye when men shall revile you and persecute you and say all manner of evil against you falsely for my sake. Rejoice and be exceedingly glad, and this is really the beauty of this whole thing, for great is

your reward in heaven for so persecuted they the prophets that were before you. If you want to identify a hybrid today versus the true church of Jesus Christ, this is a very important point to see whether they will accept the sufferings of humanity upon their life, upon their church, and be ridiculed and talked about and their name cast out as evil, and they can take it patiently and they can even smile and rejoice and be excited that they have the opportunity to suffer with the Lord in that way without always retaliating and trying to get back and figuring out how we can give them the next punch or something like that.

And that is often the identification, again, of a hybrid to those who will not believe this. And like one man said, I can't put up with this, so I don't have to put up with this, being talked to like that or being treated like that. And that's the attitude of the hybrid many times, and they will want to fight back.

All right, furthermore, so we have that. And if you go back, it's very easy for you if you study church history to go back over the last 2,000 years. And, brethren, it is not hard to identify that line of people who were opposed and persecuted and hunted down and their material goods confiscated and their houses burned down and they're put in the prison and they were beheaded and they were at the stake and all of that.

And today you are persecuted and opposed for even visiting or joining that group, a group of people like that. That is the line of history. And not only that, but in the future, according to the book of Revelation, we will have great difficulty coming upon us, yet in the future, I believe, as the church of Jesus Christ, for the faith, when it becomes more and more intolerable by the world, and we see that happening before our very eyes, that there is less and less toleration for the Christian.

Today you can get up and read the Koran in school and you can read Harry Potter and you can read the Sons of Wicca and anything you want to read, but don't bring that Bible into the church, into the school and read it in front of the students. You can't even quote a scripture hardly in commencement exercises of graduation in our nation anymore. And that shows you what's happening in that way.

All right, then he further says in verse 13, You are the salt of the earth and you are the light of the world. And this is again a great difference, a great shift from the Old Testament saints. They used to live in a city and they'd build walls around themselves to defend themselves.

But all at once you have a city set on a hill and there's no walls and there's no fence. You simply have an open heaven and an open door and you try to beam the lights of truth and the lights of the gospel out across the known world. That is ahead of you.

And I just love the illustration, somebody mentioned it maybe on Sunday or yesterday already, how that, I think the communists, how that they built walls to keep their people in. And it's been interesting in the analogy of the United States versus Russia. You know, they build a wall to keep the people in and we're putting walls in Mexico to keep the people out.

They all want to come in. And that's because if you have what you need, then the people want to come in because they love the life and they love what you have. And that's the way the light of the gospel should be.

We should have sinners that want to come in because they can get rid of their sin and they can have victory over it and they can stop their sinning business and their adultery and their fornications and their stealings and their smoking and drinking and all that. And that's what the church should represent. Hey, power over the human nature and over the messes we get ourselves into in our youth, in our young years.

A city that is set on a hill and the light of the world, a city that is set on a hill cannot be hid. And also there the salt of the earth. Salt, by the way, is a preservative.

And I do believe that the matter of the true church and the Christians that are left in this world have been the preserving element of not having fallen under the major outpouring of the wrath of God already. And it's because of you and I here in the United States and many more like us yet, that God has held back His wrath as much as He had because salt preserves in that way. But if the salt is lost its flavor, then I believe the wrath of God is going to come.

Also very interesting, in that same subject, I'm hoping I have time to address a little bit the conflict due to many in us, many who have heard the accusations here over the years against us because we don't have these written laws or written standards. We have over our last 25 years here tried to maintain that Christianity is that of the heart. You know, and that if we don't have the people's hearts, it's just hard to fence them in and to make them stay there and to make them behave in certain ways with rules and regulations.

And maybe I'll get to talk about that, but Brother Emanuel Lapp when he had the opening meditation brought out this wonderful scripture in Isaiah, salvation now has to be determined for walls and for bulwarks. And that's still the unique part of the true church or the unique doctrine or practice of the true church is that salvation should be thorough enough and an experience in our lives that we want to live godly. We don't have to be fenced in and hemmed in and baked and bartered and all to live a certain way and not go here and not go there and not do this and not do that.

Salvation is for walls and for bulwarks. And that brings the salvation itself, brings the separation from the world and our desires change and we don't want to be in the middle of the world and go to the places they do and do the things they do. Examine yourself whether you have had that kind of a sin-killing experience in your life, whether salvation that you have is good enough and great enough to be a wall and a bulwark for your life.

Of course, in the New Testament theology, we know that's accomplished through the Spirit of the God living in the midst of the believer. Salvation for walls and bulwarks. But here throughout this sermon and various times here in the New Testament, I just love it that we have this major shift in it has been said, but I say unto you.

And so we notice that that negates or puts to fulfillment and finality a form of commandment and raises up a new one. And we must see that change as we read the Bible, lest we will be confused with Old Testament law that formerly was a practice, but now there is a new practice brought upon us through the gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ. Here in this sermon, we have the fact that you cannot be angry with your brother anymore.

In the Old Testament, I believe that was allowable. You could get angry with your brother. And there were times I realized that in the case with Joab, when he smote two of his fellow countrymen there under the fifth rib and so on.

You know, we have that finally dealt with at the end of his life. But there was a lot of anger back and forth even amongst godly men against their enemies. They taught the hating of their enemies.

And there is a major shift and a major change in the Sermon on the Mount where he tells us that we cannot be angry with our brother anymore. And Brother Aaron mentioned it last night. I won't spend a lot of time on it, that you cannot.

It used to be said that you can't commit adultery. And as far as you need to restrain yourself from the very act, but now if you look on a woman, the lust after her, you have committed adultery already in your heart. We see that the commandment is actually strengthening and increasing in some of these areas.

And that is very important that we see that change taking place. We can see a radical change. That word was used last night and I'd like to underscore it again today.

The New Testament lifestyle, the New Testament experience is a radical change in human life, and in church life, and in personal life. And we need to see that. You used to be able to give a writing of divorce, but you had a hardness in your heart and you didn't like the woman you were living with.

You could find an excuse if she burned your food in a New Testament time, you could put her away. But all at once the Lord Jesus sits on the hill and says, No more. You can't divorce your wife and go marry another.

Other than that, you will be living in adultery. You'll cause her to commit adultery and you will be living in adultery if you do that. Don't listen to the hybrids.

Don't listen to the hybrids that are setting aside the Sermon on the Mount and trying to find a way out around it. You can't even swear an oath anymore. Oaths were very prevalent in the Old Testament times.

But now it's yea, yea, nay, nay, and whatsoever is more than that cometh of evil. You may affirm things and you may say, I'm speaking the truth, I tell you the truth, and perhaps some of those things are acceptable, but basically we should be known for our honesty that we say it is so, it is believed to be so. And there is no question or no emphasis needed further than that.

You cannot resist evil anymore. You are commanded now to love your enemies. And that is often, somebody goes down into the details of that and tries to take it apart and give you hypothetical situations of men attacking your wife and all of that and try to make it sound absurd and it doesn't mean what it says, but the Bible says, resist not evil, and it says, if your enemy hunger, feed him, and if he thirsts, give him drink.

Some time ago, a farmer out in, I think it was in the Franklin County area, some years ago, had trouble with things being stolen and finally his gas tank started emptying out. He just noticed that he believes somebody is stealing gas. And so on Sunday morning he decided, I'm going to stay home and see if I can catch this fellow.

Sure enough, sometime, it happened while he normally went to church on Sunday morning and the neighbor knew it, and so he came in there and he backs up to the gas pump and he didn't, apparently didn't have it padlocked or whatever, and he starts pumping gas into his tank. The farmer got up, went out to walks, said, here, let me help you. Got a hold of the crank and crank continued to crank.

My man was so ashamed, he didn't know what to do, and he said, please, don't report me. And the man said, I'll do that on one occasion if you come to my house for lunch. He went home, got his family, the farmer demanded the whole family comes, and he came that next week in the evening for supper, I

believe it was.

And that's all that was done. He just gave him a meal and sent him on his way. But a few nights later, a whole pile of goods showed up back on the farm.

It even works. But whether it works or not, you're still called to do it. And anything else than that is a hybrid.

That is what Jesus taught. That is what Jesus taught. Once again, you can take your church history books for the last 2,000 years, and it's even called uniquely so, the defenseless Christians.

The story of the martyrs, Mira. The defenseless Christians. Those who will suffer all kinds of things.

I was just reading about Diocletian, I think it was there the other day, pouring hot lead down people's throats, you know. And I just tried for a moment to imagine that. I cannot.

I cannot imagine those kind of things. But this is what men patiently endured, patiently took as their role in life, saying, my master has suffered for me on a cruel cross, and endured all those things in rejection, and he was a righteous and perfect man. Here at least I am not a righteous and a perfect man, and yet he followed in his footsteps and wrote the books, the defenseless Christians.

Jesus further said in the book of Matthew, wise as serpents and harmless as doves. He did not allow a man to rally his buddies around him and get a machine gun and blow somebody's head off on the other side. You know, it's very interesting, if you study the history of the Civil War, that there were pauses in fighting, that the Northern Army went to the Confederates, and the Confederates came over to the Northern, and brothers sat in the tent and visited and chatted together, even it is known that fathers lived in Pennsylvania, and their sons may have lived in Maryland, so the sons were with the Confederates, and the father was in Pennsylvania with the Northern Army, and they took a pause for a Sunday, and the people sat there and visited, maybe read their Bibles and all that, and on Monday mornings slaughtered each other by the thousands.

Doesn't make sense. Not in my kingdom, the Lord says. Things don't operate that way.

Not anymore. Used to be that way, an eye for an eye and a tooth for a tooth, but not anymore. That's all over.

The same is true for laying up treasures in heaven rather than on earth. Brother Aaron mentioned that last night, and I won't say a lot about that. You cannot serve God in mammon, and you can't even take anxious thought about tomorrow.

You can't just sit at home and worry about what I'm going to do next year or next winter or something like that, and I do not believe in his teaching that a person can't cut wood for the summer, for the winter heating season. But his anxious thought, that thing of fretting and worrying, you know, what am I going to do, and how is it going to work out, and oh my, and oh me, and we sit down and bring calamity upon our whole nervous system and body because we worry and fret and do not trust the God of heaven for the future. But especially we have an attack upon laying up treasures where moth and rust is corrupt and thieves break through and steal, and yet our whole society is looking for early retirement and substantial retirement and all those things to try to have their nest egg well padded, and they even try to equate the rate of inflation that is going on so they are sure it's going to reach when they're old.

And they kill the security that old men used to have, and that was children. Isn't that something? How the world can get twisted so drastically out of order. Matthew 12, 46.

We have another strange thing going on here. The distinctives of the kingdom. Verse 44, Again, the kingdom of heaven is like unto a treasure hidden afield, that which the man hath found he hideth, and for joy thereof goeth and selleth all that he hath and buyeth that field.

What is he saying? A man has found eternal life. A man has found the reality of the Christianity to be so precious that he lets hold of that thing, and his father says, Now, son, if you're going to do that, you're going to lose the family farm. And he doesn't care anymore whether he loses the family farm or whatever he loses.

He has found that great treasure, and he's willing to part with everything. Radical, radical Christianity. Oh, what a shift that is from what we knew had been said.

But now I say unto you, Look at the next one. Basically saying the same, or very similar. Again, the kingdom of heaven, the church of Jesus Christ, this new belief, this new way of looking at things.

Again, the kingdom of heaven is like unto a merchant seeking goodly pearls, who when he has found one pearl of great price, went and sold all that he had and bought it. Christianity is so high, so beautiful, so wonderful, that it's right for you to leave everything in order to get it. That's the teachings of the kingdom.

Nothing should stop us from embracing the kingdom of God, the kingdom of heaven, the church of Jesus Christ, the new life in Christ. And so it goes on. I mentioned verse 47 yesterday about the kingdom of heaven there.

And that indeed is some of the radical Christianity. Matthew chapter 10 talks about trouble in the family, and clearly lays out that the family of God, brothers, is higher than earthly family. Jesus was preaching one time, and I think one of his disciples came in and said, Hey, thy mother and thy brothers are out there and they seek you.

They wanted him to stop the meeting and go out and talk to them. And he looked across the crowd and he said, Behold, my mother and my brethren, this is my family. And it's more important than this family.

You know, we have other records that his brothers didn't believe him, they were offended at him and all that. And he had a right reason to say what he wanted to say there, because it was real to him. They were embarrassed by brother Jesus, the way he's talking and the way he's acting.

Ah, we're embarrassed. He makes himself sound like he's somebody special, and he's bringing a special message, and he's going around healing and preaching people and putting all this focus, and the people wonder who we are and what kind of a family this is. You know how the scribes and the Pharisees looked down on him, and they had to suffer some shame for that.

And they didn't like it. But the secret that he's given out, and this is something many of us still can hardly come to grips with, that the family of God is higher and more important and more precious than our earthly family. And it is not right when the earthly family and the earthly brothers and sisters, especially when they are not converted, are pulling you away from all kinds of godliness and church meetings and things that you should be attending to and the things of God, and saying, well, my family, they don't like it when I do that.

Let me first go and bury my dad, then I'll come and follow you. He that put his hand on a plow and looked back is not fit for the kingdom of heaven. My kingdom is exclusive.

The distinctives of my kingdom will demand a loyalty you will not see anywhere else. And I've seen some pretty high loyalties of what family members will do to family members in the world for each other. But God is calling for a higher one on the church of Jesus Christ.

In fact, in 1 John, he goes so radically far that he asks us to lay our lives down for the brethren. That's what the scripture teaches. Oh, radical Christianity.

Those who trespass or who have been trespassed against must actually forgive those trespasses before they can be forgiven. Wow! How is that possible? And it has led many of our soul winners in this building, I believe, that have been active in that, and wrestling through with a soul that's trying to come to Christ, and they get up against a block, and nothing is happening, and they can't break through unto God, to ask the question, what are the people in your life you cannot forgive? They have wounded you and harmed you, and you're holding a grudge against them. And all at once, here they come.

Here they come. Oh, yes. Oh, yes.

I did that once to a 70-year-old lady sitting across the table from me at a fellowship meal in the state of Wisconsin. Old and gray haired. There she sat.

And she was struggling to believe and struggling to have assurance of salvation. And I happened just to ask her that question, and immediately she identified it and said, oh, something had happened to me in my life, and I have never been able to forgive. And that day, as far as I know, she found peace and forgiveness by being able to forgive that individual on her knees before God, there or in prayer.

And you know, you just have to let it go. You can't fix it. You can't solve it.

You don't need to. You can't say, well, what about them? You just kind of let it go and release it from your heart and say, okay, okay. I forgive them.

They may not have realized how they hurt me or what they did to me. We ought to let it go. The church of Jesus Christ is not a building of brick and stone.

He dwelt not in temples made with hands. It hath been that he dwelt between the serapims in the holy place with a veil. And only the high priest went in once a year, and then he had a going sprinkling with blood.

But now he dwelleth not in temples made with hands. And it's not wise to make a lot about a building to say that's the church. The church of Jesus Christ is we, His children, that have been born again and changed by God's power and life.

It's not just a set of rules and regulations, do's and don'ts. It is a living reality with a living Savior, the Lord Jesus Christ. It's a holy nation.

And back in Hebrews 8, it again makes that great distinction of the two covenants when it says in verse 8, for finding fault with them, he says, speaking about the old, Behold, the days come, saith the Lord, when I will make a new covenant with the house of Israel and with the house of Judah, not according to the covenant that I made with their fathers in the day when I took them by the hand to lead them out of the

land of Egypt. Because they continued not in my covenant and I regarded them not, saith the Lord. For this is the covenant that I will make with the house of Israel after those days, saith the Lord.

I will put my laws in their hearts or in their mind. And I will put my laws into their mind and write them in their hearts. And I have to say, as a minister, church life is depressing many times or discouraging and worrisome when you're trying to get people to walk the ways of God and they don't have this thing written in their heart.

That is burdensome work. Trying to get people to love the Lord when they just nonchalantly sit back in the back bench, kick up their heels, slouch down in their seat and wait for the service to get over. But they still want to get baptized because they still like to, you know, well, they like to get a wife, you know, and come get one of our young girls and sometimes one that's pretty dedicated and consecrated.

And I'll tell you, that's hard work. To try to get them to see the condition that they're in. And why? That we're not very excited about a beginning of courtship in that condition.

But oh, when you see people that are excited about the gospel and excited about their salvation. And salvation is walls and bulwarks. And they say, because I'm born again and God is living in me, I can't go there.

I can't have that. I can't do this. And they have these laws written in their heart and in their mind and they're full of it.

That's the kind of standard in Christianity we must contend for. I think some pretty radical thoughts sometimes, you know, when I get into places where it's so much of the other side that you just feel like shutting everything down and going home until somebody's ready to get serious for God. That's how you feel.

It's like counseling, trying to counsel a married couple when love is gone. Have you ever tried to do that? Oh, my. The hours and hours you can burn up when love is gone.

And it's not there and it's tit for tat and he said and she said and he did and she did and back and forth you go. And love is not there. And that's the way it is with our people.

If the love of the Lord Jesus is not there and the love for His Word, we just spin our wheels and consume our time and we're not getting anywhere. Much time could be spent perhaps on how to bring a change about there. It would be very good to hear many messages on that.

Matthew chapter, excuse me here, John chapter 3. How do we get into the kingdom? How do we get into the kingdom? Just want to spend a little bit of time on that because it is so important of what Jesus warns us of in His teaching. And again, it is radical teaching and let's just hear what He says. John 3, 3, Jesus answered and said unto them after Nicodemus had asked the question, Verily, verily, I say unto thee, Except a man be born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God.

And there you have it. So clearly, you have the individual seeing God's kingdom. He can't even see it.

Have you ever tried to figure out what's going on in a newborn Christian, a baby Christian, a new convert that has just been converted out of deep traditionalism and pharisaical religion and nobody can figure out what in the world is going on. They are accusing us that we are brainwashing the people and they don't

understand that they have been in touch with God and they have been born again. And all at once they see the kingdom of God.

They see a whole dimension, a whole life, a whole reality they never saw before. Except you be born again, you cannot see the kingdom of God. And then I like the other word.

In verse 5, Jesus answered, Verily I say unto you, except a man be born of water and of the Spirit, he cannot enter the kingdom of God. It's so hard to work with some of these religious people who are actually enlightened. And many of you sitting in this room, I know, can identify with this subject.

And you know that's the way it is. We are trying to figure out what to do with people, many times that are enlightened and they are kind of growing into the kingdom, but they haven't been born into it. And it makes it difficult and complicated.

Make sure, my beloved brethren and sisters, or brethren here today, that you are contending for a birth into the kingdom and not a gradual learning of the kingdom, or growing into the kingdom. We must be born into it. And a person growing into the kingdom can learn a lot of things about the kingdom and can actually accomplish a lot of doings of the kingdom in his life.

But if he's growing into it rather than being born into it, there's always something missing, it seems. So I wanted to emphasize the fact of the new birth and how one enters into the kingdom. And some of you come from far and wide, and I'm sure a crowd of this size, that there would be those who are not born again.

You are still shackled by sin, or have been, at least prior to last night. But the question is, have you been born into the kingdom? And that was that you need to see yourself as a sinner before God and be poor in spirit and be meek and be humble and lowly enough. And see your need of a savior.

And then simply ask the Lord to come in and change you and to make you a new creature and to give you that born-again experience and a peace and assurance and salvation that comes from Him, not worked up here in life. Jesus said in John 10, if I can flip over there and just use His precious words, verse 7, Jesus then said, Jesus, unto them, verily, verily, I say unto you, I am the door of the sheep. Christ the Lord is the door into the kingdom.

He is the door into the church. He is the door into the family of God. And any others that come there, as He says over in verse 9, I am the door, by me if any man enter in, he shall be saved and go in and out and find green pastures.

I missed verse 8. All that ever came before me or all that ever come any other way besides Jesus being the door are thieves and robbers. And there you have your hybrids. Again, trying to get into the kingdom without coming in through Jesus the door.

And that's a hybrid. You may have ever so good of a moral life. You may have even laid some of your major sins aside.

You're a pretty good boy. But good boys are lost unless they come in through the door. And may I just reiterate, I think what has already been given before, you cannot go into all the world and teach the heathen that they must believe only in the Creator God.

If they don't come in through His Son, they can't come in. Now they need to learn about the Creator God. And some of them don't know the first thing about Him.

And to start there and teach them that God created heaven and earth, but you're not going to bring people into the kingdom until you come to the Son who made the sacrifice for their sins and by believing on Him, whosoever believeth in Him should not perish, but have everlasting life. We cannot. And that's the way the whole, seems almost like most of the evangelical world is going to be satisfied with anybody who believes in a Creator God.

That that's good enough. He's in. He's alright.

And they're even going beyond that as long as they believe in a supreme being and they're not even requiring the Creator God anymore. In the case of Allah, Allah's not a Creator God. One of the first things that should happen after we have entered into the kingdom and we want to just break the ice here a little bit for our message tomorrow because it is time tomorrow to get down to the practical issues of church life, the church and church life that we do not want to miss.

We know that's the practical side that many of you will need or benefit from and have benefited from and are waiting also to hear and think about. But when I was converted as a young man, at fifteen and a half years of age, I was in a setting where I had zero fellowship. I did not know of another born again Christian in my church.

Not one. My father was open to the truth at that time and was searching, but he testified later on that he believes that I got born again before he did. Even though he invited me to the revival meeting where I was born again.

That was wonderful. That we were out working on a cold winter night, working in the tobacco shed and he said, would you go along to the meeting? The first week of revival meetings held by a local church in the area. They had not had any before that, protracted meetings like that.

And at that first week, I went on a Friday night and gave my heart to the Lord that night. But the strangest thing began to happen to me after that night. There was two more nights and I would have walked for miles to get to that meeting.

The desire for fellowship immediately surfaced into my heart. Anything else, I have to say, is probably a part of a hybrid again. There must be a desire to meet with God's people, not forsaking the assembly of yourselves together even so much the more as you see the day approaching which I'm going to interpret that is more important in this deceptive day than what it might have been 500 years ago.

But I remembered I so longed to go and I did. I finally got over again on Sunday night. And the strangest thing happened to me.

I was 15 and a half years of age. I was in a strange place. On Friday night when I got born again, I was so scared of everything.

Everything was so strange. I didn't hardly know anybody in the building. I was ashamed to walk the aisle and go up.

I mean, I was a fish out of water as far as my culture. And society was concerned at that time because I was in another setting here with another group of people. And so I went home and I cried out to God alone.

But on Sunday night when I went back and some concerned men and boys gathered around me and talked to me about what God is doing in my heart and all that. And I felt their love and concern for me. I melted to pieces.

And I experienced for the first time the reality of love in my life. In the former setting where I was, there was cutting statements made, nicknames given, and you were harassed and pushed around perhaps and made a fool of and all that kind of stuff. And that's the life I knew.

When we got together at a ball game in the community in our local church, you know, they would call me a nickname if I missed the ball or didn't hit the ball right or something like that, you know. And I never knew love and acceptance and warmth and concern for my soul by any of them. But when I experienced the fellowship of believers for the first time, and this was a great distinctive of the faith and a distinctive of the church of Jesus Christ, that love should emanate and reach the seeker and reach the hungry and reach the thirsty for God.

And I've heard these statements being made over and over again in the Christian church that we felt loved, we felt accepted, we felt warmth there. And that is a very important part of the experience of the body of Christ. First of all, that we enter in through the door into the sheepfold.

And remember, if you try to climb out some other way by some other doctrine, some other method and some other belief or work salvation or whatever, you are a thief and a robber. I love the explanation I read years ago about the man who tried to get in. He heard the music upstairs and he went down into the basement and got into the coal bin and dirty and black and he heard the music up there, but he tried to go in through the basement.

And then another fellow went up and he crawled into an upstairs window and he was up in the attic or up in the upstairs, and he heard the music downstairs and he heard all the beautiful things going on, but he was in the upstairs and he couldn't find his way down because he hadn't entered in by the door. And brethren, today the door is wide open and Jesus is standing at the door and inviting us all to come in through the door, but we try to enter in some other way and save ourselves. That is not going to work.

We should have a loving relationship first of all with God and His Word in our new birth experience, and right on the heels of that there ought to be a love to be together with others. And that's what makes church life and that's my introduction to my subject tomorrow. A strong desire to have some concern shown our ways for like-mindedness, to be disciplined, to be taught in the ways of God.

A desire for baptism. One of the first things as a young boy, I longed to be baptized. Have you been baptized upon your confession of faith? Don't put it off any longer if you're sitting here unbaptized.

The Bible says, Believe and be baptized and thou shalt be saved. If you're not willing, there again in obedience to walk with God and obey the commandments, you're producing a hybrid. And it's not the true church of Jesus Christ and not the true faith.

If you have been born again, you want to be baptized openly on your confession of faith in Christ. Amen. May God bless us as we continue to walk with Him and to seek His will this week.

Thank you for your attention and your desire for God. Amen.

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