

HOW DOES THE KINGDOM BUILD THE CHURCH?

Matthew 16:17-19—And Jesus answering said to him, Blessed art thou, Simon Bar-jona, for flesh and blood has not revealed it to thee, but my Father who is in the heavens. And I also, I say unto thee that thou art Peter, and on this rock I will build my assembly, and hades' gates shall not prevail against it. And I will give to thee the keys of the kingdom of the heavens; and whatsoever thou mayest bind upon the earth shall be bound in the heavens; and whatsoever thou mayest loose on the earth shall be loosed in the heavens.

Matthew 4:17—From that time began Jesus to preach and to say, Repent, for the kingdom of the heavens has drawn nigh.

Let us have a word of prayer:

Dear Lord, we want to thank Thee for gathering us again in Thy presence. We pray that Thou wilt grant us the spirit of wisdom and revelation to the full knowledge of God. How we praise and thank Thee that Thou hast shown us that Jesus is Lord. We do pray, Lord, that Thou wilt further reveal Thy mind and heart to us that we may be drawn into Thy purpose and glorify Thy name. We commit this time into Your hand and look to Thee for Thy working in each of our hearts to the glory of God. We ask in Thy name. Amen.

The reason for our gathering is to focus our attention on the King and the kingdom. We have already been given a vision of the King, and hopefully it will not only be with us continually but it will be increasing. I will be speaking on the church and the kingdom.

THE CHURCH—THE CALLED-OUT ONES

First of all, we need to know the Scriptural meaning of the church as well as the kingdom so that as we continue to share we will know exactly what we are talking about. The word *church* is very common among God's people, but unfortunately, it is not an exact translation from the Greek original. As a matter of fact, the word *church* in English that we have today is translated from another Greek word which means "pertaining to the Lord." In other words, it can be explained as the assembly of Christian believers or it can be used as the place where they worship. Most people, today, probably think of the church as a building where the Christians meet. It seems to be the common notion, but it is not an accurate translation. Because of that, I think God's people throughout the centuries do not have a correct understanding of the church that our Lord Jesus is building; for this word *church* comes from the Greek word *ecclesia* which means "called-out ones gathered together." Those who are called out of the world gather together to the name of the Lord Jesus, and that is exactly what the church means.

WHO IS THIS MAN

The Lord Jesus said: "I will build My church upon this rock, and the gates of Hades shall not prevail against it" (see Matthew 16:18). After He was rejected by His people and had retreated to the border of Caesarea Philippi, which is a Gentile city, He asked this question to His disciples: "Who do men say that I the Son of Man am?" (Matthew 16:13b.) Of course,

His disciples had heard lots of rumors, but to be polite to their Master they did not tell Him everything; they only told Him good reports. "Some say that You are Elijah, the great prophet. Some say that You are Jeremiah because You weep. Then there were some who could not identify You and say You are one of the prophets." These are all good reports, but our Lord Jesus was not satisfied.

I often say, "When people say we Chinese are like Confucius, I think that is the greatest compliment." And we would probably say, "No I am not worthy of that." But when the disciples reported to the Lord Jesus these marvelous descriptions from the human standpoint, you could not have given Him greater praise than these. However, our Lord Jesus was not satisfied because they did not know Him. So He turned to His disciples and said: "You have been with me for some time day and night; you should know me better. Who do you think that I am?" Thank God, Simon Peter said: "You are the Christ, the Son of the living God. So far as Your Person is concerned, You are the Son of the living God. So far as Your ministry is concerned, You are the Christ, the sent One of God to accomplish a definite purpose." And when our Lord heard that, He said: "You are blessed, Simon Bar-jonah, because this is not something that human beings could have told you. Flesh and blood will never know Me in that way. Probably all they can know is that You are like Elijah or the other prophets. But it is My Father who is in the heavens who has revealed this to you."

THE REASON CHRIST CAME TO THIS WORLD

Brothers and sisters, we are blessed because out of millions of people, God should look upon us and reveal His Son not only to us but in us. This is where the Lord revealed what was uppermost in His heart. In other words, He came to this world to seek and to save the lost, but there is something more in His heart. And at this time the Lord began to reveal what was really in His heart. This is the first time our Lord Jesus mentioned the word *church*. He said, "You are Peter; I will build My church upon this rock, and the gates of Hades shall not prevail against it" (see Matthew 16:18). This is a tremendous revelation. It is something that is uppermost in the heart of our Lord Jesus, and it is that for which our Lord Jesus really came into the world. He came, not just to seek and save the lost—that is only the first step—the reason for His coming is to build His church. The way He is going to build His church is heavenly; it is not worldly in any way.

He said, "You are Peter, I will build My church upon this rock." The foundation of the church is Christ Himself; He is the Rock. But those who are to be built upon that foundation are not Simons; they are Peters who confess Christ. In other words, the church is not built with the natural man which is the flesh. The church is built with that which is spiritual; it is that life which God has given to us.

In other words, Jesus said: "You are Peter. My life is in you and this is what I will be building my church with. And what I have built, even the gates of Hades shall not prevail against it." This is something God has desired even before the foundation of the world, and it is why God sent His Son into this world. This is what His Son came for. And because this is such a tremendous thing to God, we find that all the gates of Hades have been opened against it to prevent the building from being completed. Nevertheless, the Lord Jesus said, "Because I am building My church, the gates of Hades shall not prevail against it."

THE CHURCH IS TO BE THE BODY OF CHRIST

So we find that this is what the church is, and it is what God wants for His beloved Son. The church is to be the body of Christ as we find in Ephesians: “God has made Christ Head over all things to the church, which is His body, the fullness of Him who fills all in all” (see 1:22-23). Dear brothers and sisters, the church is not a small thing. We cannot play church. The church is something deep in the heart of God and in the heart of our Lord Jesus. This is not something man can build. The reason why we find the so-called church being destroyed by the enemy throughout the centuries is because it is not the church that Christ Himself is building. If it were being built by the Lord Jesus Himself, the enemy could not prevail against it.

THE UNIVERSAL CHURCH

The Lord Jesus mentioned the word church twice in His teaching—once in Matthew 16, which we have already discussed, and then again in Matthew 18. He said, “If your brother sins against you go and try to restore him. If he listens to you, thank God. If not, your responsibility is not finished yet. Find two other brothers who are respected by that sinful one, and go to him again and tell him what he has done wrong. If he listens to you, you have gained a brother. If he does not listen to you, then you go and tell the church.”

Now we know that the church is universal. The church is composed of all who believe in the Lord Jesus from the first one who believed in Him to the very last one before He returns throughout the expanse of time and space. So how can you go and tell the church? Where can you find it? Therefore, we find that the church has another aspect. The church is universally one—from the very first one who has believed in the Lord Jesus to the very last one. We are all members of the same body, and our Lord Jesus is the Head of the church. All of the spiritual principles of the church can be found in the church universal such as the headship of Christ and the coordination of the members of the body of Christ. However, we are still in this human body. And as long as we are in this human body, we are limited by time and space, even though spiritually we do have fellowship with all the members of the body of Christ throughout the ages; yet physically, we are limited by time and space. That is the reason why the church has another aspect—the local church—such as the church in Jerusalem, Antioch, Ephesus, and so on. This is because of our human limitations.

THE LOCAL CHURCH

So we discover in Matthew 18 the Lord Jesus showing us the other aspect of the church. He said: “Where two or three are gathered together unto My name, there I am in their midst” (see v. 20). This is the simplest term of the church local. In other words, we live in a community. When our Lord Jesus was on earth, He visited cities and villages, and remember, the cities in that time are not like the ones today. Our cities are metropolitan which include many, many societies. But at that time, a city or a village was a unit where people congregated; they knew each other and they lived together. So our Lord Jesus said, “When two or three are gathered together,”—that is the smallest plural number. When two or three people believe in the Lord Jesus, they gather together. They do not gather under any name other than the name of our Lord Jesus. We sometimes take a name very casually, as if it means almost nothing. But to God, name is very important. The church local

gathered together unto the name of our Lord Jesus. It simply means that when you take the name of the Lord Jesus, you take Him as your Head. You allow Him to have full control over your life. The two or three put themselves under the headship of Christ. They gather together to worship Him, to serve Him, and to glorify Him. This is what the Lord Jesus says is a local church, and basically speaking, this is the church we are talking about.

THE KINGDOM OF GOD

Now we will consider the kingdom. The emphasis of kingdom is not on territory but on the person of the king. I believe that Brother T. Austin-Sparks said, "The word *kingdom* is not rightly understood; it simply means "sovereign rule." In other words, when you think of the kingdom, you do not think of the territory in the first place; rather, you think of the king. As a matter of fact, he characterizes what the kingdom is. Therefore, when we are talking about the kingdom, the focus is upon the King Himself, the Lord Jesus. So far as the kingdom of God is concerned, that term is very broad because from eternity to eternity He is God. Therefore, everything that He has created is His kingdom, and His rule is over all.

In Psalm 145 we read these words: "Thy kingdom is a kingdom of all ages, and thy dominion is throughout all generations" (v. 13).

Again we read in 1 Chronicles 29: "Thine, Jehovah, is the greatness, and the power, and the glory, and the splendour, and the majesty; for all that is in the heavens and on the earth is thine: thine, Jehovah, is the kingdom, and thou art exalted as Head above all; and riches and glory are of thee, and thou rulest over everything; and in thy hand is power and might; and in thy hand it is to make all great and strong. And now, our God, we thank thee, and praise thy glorious name."

THE KINGDOM OF THE HEAVENS

So the kingdom of God spans from eternity to eternity, and it covers the heavens and earth because our God is the Creator and the Ruler of all. But when we talk about the kingdom of the heavens, it is a special term found only in Matthew. Now if you try to search the Scriptures, you may find two other places, one in the Old Testament and one in the New Testament, that refers to it. It is the same thought. For instance, in the Old Testament in Daniel 4, he said, "The heavens do rule." In the New Testament in II Corinthians 4 we find the apostle Paul is looking forward to the heavenly kingdom. But other than these two, this is a special term used in the Gospel of Matthew.

When we think of the gospel of salvation, we usually think of Luke because it is the gospel of grace. Our Lord Jesus came to seek, to find, and to save the lost. It is for our salvation; it is grace from the beginning to the very end. Therefore, when we think of the gospel, our thoughts are of grace and nothing else. But according to God's thought, the Gospel according to Matthew is sovereignly put before the Gospel of Luke. From man's standpoint the gospel of salvation is the Gospel of Luke which is grace. But from God's standpoint the gospel is the kingdom of the heavens, and we find this special term in Matthew.

Are the kingdom of God and the kingdom of the heavens the same or are they different? In one sense, they are one because the gospel of the kingdom of the heavens is within the kingdom of God. The kingdom of God is the overall rule of God, but there is a section within the kingdom of God that we call the gospel of the kingdom. That section begins with the first coming of Christ because when our Lord Jesus came, He began to preach: "Repent for

the kingdom of the heavens has drawn nigh.” So we know that His first coming brought in the gospel of the kingdom of the heavens, and it will be completed at His second coming at which time He will establish His kingdom of the heavens upon this earth. This means that at that time the heavens will rule upon this earth. So when we talk about the kingdom, our emphasis is rather on the kingdom of the heavens because it has a special relationship with us.

GOD’S PURPOSE FOR THE CREATION OF MAN

We all know that the world we are living in today has gone through a catastrophe. We do not know when it happened, but we know in Genesis 1:1 says, “In the beginning God created the heavens and earth.” When God creates something, He will never leave it half-done. When He creates anything, He speaks and it is done. So we believe that when God created the heavens and the earth, they were complete, as told in the book of Job when God laid the foundation of the earth, it says that the morning stars, which refer to the angels, sang for joy. In the first heaven and earth there was harmony. God ruled over all, and He was worshipped without any problem. Unfortunately, we find in Genesis 1:2: “The earth became void and waste.” In other words, in prehistoric time a catastrophe had come into the world. If you want to know about it you can read Isaiah, chapter 14, and there you will find how Lucifer the archangel rebelled against God. That is the reason why the earth went through a catastrophe and was covered with water and everything died.

Thank God, we find that the Spirit of God brooded over the face of the deep. His love came upon this ruined earth and brought it back to be habitable. In six days God created and made the earth habitable. On the sixth day man was created by God, and he was wonderful because God had created man in a way that He had never done before. He never created the angels in that way even though they were spirits. But when He created man, He created him according to His own image after His own likeness. Why is it so? It is because God has a purpose behind it. He wanted to use man, who was a little lower than the angels, to defeat the rebellious angel. It would bring no glory to God for Him to destroy Satan, but it gives Him great glory to use someone lower than the angels who would submit to Him in such a way that He could be the instrument to defeat His enemy. That is the reason why our Lord Jesus came into the world in the first place. God sent His Son into this world to be the Man who would defeat His enemy.

REPENT FOR THE KINGDOM HAS DRAWN NIGH

When our Lord Jesus first came into the world, He began to preach the gospel of the kingdom. He said, “Repent for the kingdom of the heavens has drawn nigh.” He came into this world as King, but at that time, He did not have a kingdom. In other words, the King had come but where were the citizens or the people of the kingdom? That is the reason why when our Lord Jesus was thirty years old, He came forth and began to preach the gospel of the kingdom of the heavens. “Repent for the kingdom of the heavens has drawn nigh.” He said that it was drawing nigh because the King was here but there were no people yet. He was here preaching the kingdom of the heavens, trying to find a people for Himself.

We read in Colossians 1 that He has delivered us out of the power of darkness and translated us into the kingdom of the Son of God’s love. This is what the Lord Jesus came to this earth for in the first place—to deliver us out of the kingdom of darkness or out of the

power of darkness. After Adam sinned we were all under the power of darkness (see Ephesians 2), and our Lord Jesus came to deliver us out of the power of darkness.

Brothers and sisters, it is more than a personal thing. Thank God, it is personal because we who were dead in sins and transgressions, who were hopeless and without God, thank God that in His love and mercy He sent His beloved Son to come and save us. By His blood our sins have been forgiven, and by His death, His life was released and given to us. Therefore, today, we are born again. So far as our position is concerned, we have been delivered, but it is not just personal; it is corporate. We are no longer under the power of darkness as we were before because He has translated us out of it and into the kingdom of the Son of God's love. That is our position today. So in a sense, positionally speaking, we are all in the kingdom of the heavens.

THE KINGDOM IS TAKEN BY VIOLENCE

When you come to Matthew, chapter 11, the Lord Jesus began to say that the kingdom of the heavens is to be taken by violence, and the violent seize upon it. We know that when our Lord Jesus spoke these words, He had already called disciples to Himself. There were people who not only believed in Him, but ones who submitted themselves to Him and followed Him. He said: "The kingdom of heavens is not only nigh, it is now here."

How can you get into the kingdom of heavens in reality and not just in position? He said, "The violent shall take it." He used very strong words, almost like battle words. The kingdom of the heavens is to be seized. It is not something that you drift into or something that is automatically yours. Even though you have that position in the kingdom, it does not mean you have the possession of it. How are you going to possess that kingdom of the heavens? He said, "There needs to be violence." And the word *violent* is a very bad word to us because it has a very bad connotation. But strictly speaking, the word *violent* is neutral. It depends on whom you exercise that violence. If it is against other people, that is very sinful; but if you exercise violence upon yourself, that is something commendable.

It is like our Lord Jesus who throughout His life did violence to Himself. He never tried to cater to His flesh or do anything to please Himself. Even His timing was not in His head. Our Lord Jesus lived a life that did violence to Himself. He laid down Himself, submitted to the Father and obeyed Him even unto death, and that the death of the cross. This was the struggle in the garden of Gethsemane and it was because He was human. However, it was there that He said: "Not my will, but Thy will be done." What a violence He did to Himself! And because He did violence to Himself, He brought the kingdom to us. So that is why if you truly want to gain the kingdom, there is a price you have to pay.

WHY IS THE CHURCH NOT BUILT TODAY?

We are considering this matter of how the kingdom builds the church. As you look at the church today, probably you will be disappointed. As a matter of fact, if you honestly look at yourself you will be disappointed. Why is it that we are not what we should be? Why is the church not built? Everywhere you look, it is decaying. Even when you look at yourself, it is defeat. Why is it so? Must we be like that? Is there any hope for the church? I think it is a very urgent question, not only to us individually, but even to us corporately. Why is the church not built? How can the church be built? Even personally, how can I be built in

Christ? The church is built by the kingdom. If we allow the kingdom truth to really work in our lives, then the church will be built.

MAN CANNOT BUILD THE CHURCH

Here, I would like to use a simple formula. In the sixties brother Sparks, Fromke, and I use to minister together in the Wabana conference. One year we were talking about this, and I tried to help brothers and sisters to come to a clear understanding of what the church is. So I turned to brother Sparks and said: "You have to excuse me." I knew that brother Sparks was so spiritual that he was against all formulas. Nevertheless, I told him I was going to use this formula. If there are only three Christians in the world and they are the very best Christians—for instance, Peter, John, and James—nothing could be better than that because with these three people together you would have a glorious church. However, if you read the Scriptures, you will find this is not true because Peter always liked to be the head. And John and James were no different because when our Lord Jesus was journeying into Jerusalem, they felt that the Lord was to be crowned and what could they do. They had been striving among themselves all these years but nothing happened. So they brought their mother to the Lord who, humanly speaking, was our Lord's aunt, and the word of the aunt would have weight. Of course, their mother was glad to do that. She took the two boys and went to the Lord Jesus and said: "We have a request. Promise You will answer us." I think probably they did not feel very good about saying it and maybe even a little bit ashamed, but they wanted it so much. But the Lord never writes a blank check. He said, "What do you really want?" So she answered: "When You sit on the throne, will You put my two sons, one on Your right and one on Your left." The Lord said, "This is not something I can give; My Father will give it. But can you drink the cup that I am going to drink? Can you be baptized with the baptism that I am going to be baptized with?" Without knowing themselves they said, "We can." But the Lord said, "It is for My Father to give." The other ten were indignant because these two brothers had out-manuevered them.

We can see that if we have the best Christians in the world forming the church, we still have problems. So I said, "Since this is not so, I will use another formula. What is the church? The Christ in Peter plus the Christ in John plus the Christ in James equals the church. Is it right now?" Many people said yes. Will you say yes or no? I say no. Even if you have the Christ in these three persons, how about these three persons outside of Christ? They are also there, and as long as they are there, there are problems. No matter how good you are, as long as the flesh is there, there are always problems. Finally I said, "What is the church? The church is Christ in Peter minus Peter, plus Christ in John minus John, plus Christ in James minus James. And everybody said, Amen.

Brothers and sisters, the building of the church is not as simple as we think. If the Lord should ask us to build the church, what will come forth? It will appear as the tower of Babel. That is all we can do. We often say that the problem of why the church is not built is Satan, but strictly speaking, he is not *the* problem. *The* problem is I, you, our self. That is the greatest problem to our Lord Jesus. He has no problem dealing with Satan or dealing with the world, but He has a great problem dealing with us. We are the problem. No matter how sweet you are, you are the problem. That is the reason why the demand is so high. There is nothing that can build the church except kingdom truth. When the kingdom truth really

sinks into our heart and we know what it requires, unless we do violence to ourselves, we cannot seize it. This is the only way—the way of the cross.

THE GREAT COMMISSION

In Matthew 28 we find the Great Commission, and people often say, “We are obeying the Great Commission by going to the whole world and evangelizing it.” But if we read it carefully, we find that is wrong. It is not that God does not want us to go to the world and evangelize the world, for this is the first step. But reading carefully, the Great Commission says, “Go and disciple all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, teaching them all things I have taught you, and I will be with you to the very end of the age.” The Great Commission is discipleship. A person cannot be a disciple if he is not a believer. Believers and disciples are together; they cannot be separated. The problem with us today is that we separate believer and disciple. We think we can be a believer and not be a disciple, but in the heart and will of God these two things go together.

DISCIPLESHIP

What does it mean to be discipled? Again, there is so much misunderstanding about it. When it says we are sent out to disciple all nations, we often think it means to disciple them to ourselves. That is a great error. In this country in the sixties, there was a great charismatic movement in which many people got saved—Protestants, Catholics, and Orthodox Jews got saved. It was a glorious beginning. However, as it went on the discipleship teaching began to come in, and when that happened, people tried to make it work. So instead of discipling to Christ, they tried to disciple to man. It caused a great problem among God’s people and almost broke up the charismatic movement.

What does it mean to be a disciple? Disciple simply means that we leave everything behind and put ourselves completely under our Master, allowing Him to change us, to transform us until we come out almost like Him. That is discipleship.

Brothers and sisters, our Lord Jesus is our only Master. He said, “Do not call anyone teacher; you have only one Teacher. The Lord Himself is our Teacher.” We can direct people towards the Lord or bring them to the Lord. That is all we can do. We cannot change anyone, but we can bring them to the Lord. If we bring them to the Lord and let the Lord disciple and change them, we will find what a work He can do. So the church is to be built by the kingdom.

THE PREACHING OF THE KINGDOM

The preaching of the kingdom of the heavens has to be revived and continue to go on. When it reaches the whole world, the end shall come. This is promised by our Lord in Matthew 24. When the gospel of the kingdom of the heavens has gone to the end of the world, then the end is come. First of all, we need to teach, to spread the gospel of the kingdom of the heavens.

POSSESSING THE KINGDOM

However, it is not just preaching alone. When we hear of the kingdom of the heavens coming, what should we do? Although we have the position in that kingdom, are we in

possession of the kingdom? If we want to possess it, there is only one way. We need to do violence to ourselves. We are not to cater to ourselves but put ourselves under the absolute sovereign rule of Christ and let the Holy Spirit guide and lead us. When He deals with us, it is very gentle. God never deals with us in such a way that He almost puts us to death. When the Holy Spirit deals with us, He deals gently and softly—but steadily.

When God appeared to Elijah, he heard the wind, but God was not there. He saw the fire but God was not there. He saw the shaking and the quaking, but God was not there. Then he heard the still small voice, and God came.

When the Lord Jesus deals with us by His Spirit to bring us into the reality of the kingdom of the heavens, He comes in such a gentle way. He measures our condition and knows exactly how much He can work in us. And He will faithfully and persistently work in our lives until the work is done. So how can the church be built? It is built by the kingdom. May the Lord prepare our hearts to truly surrender ourselves into His hands and there is nothing better or sweeter than that.

Let me share with you a secret. How can we endure such violence? We cannot, but thank God, when the Holy Spirit leads us through that violence, He reveals God's love to us, and only His love brings us through. That is the secret. So may the Lord help us.

Shall we pray:

Dear Lord, we acknowledge that in ourselves there is no good. Wilt Thou reveal Thy love to us in such a way that it will melt our hearts and allow us to do what we cannot do, that we may be able to yield ourselves to Thee totally so that Thou mayest be able to truly build Thy church and the gates of Hades shall not prevail against it. Glorify Yourself. We ask in Thy name. Amen.