

THE CHARACTER OF THE KINGDOM

OBEDIENCE TO THE WILL OF GOD AND FAITHFULNESS

Matthew 26:36-46—Then cometh Jesus with them unto a place called Gethsemane, and saith unto his disciples, Sit ye here, while I go yonder and pray. And he took with him Peter and the two sons of Zebedee, and began to be sorrowful and sore troubled. Then saith he unto them, My soul is exceeding sorrowful, even unto death: abide ye here, and watch with me. And he went forward a little, and fell on his face, and prayed, saying, My Father, if it be possible, let this cup pass away from me: nevertheless, not as I will, but as thou wilt. And he cometh unto the disciples, and findeth them sleeping, and saith unto Peter, What, could ye not watch with me one hour? Watch and pray, that ye enter not into temptation: the spirit indeed is willing, but the flesh is weak. Again a second time he went away, and prayed, saying, My Father, if this cannot pass away, except I drink it, thy will be done. And he came again and found them sleeping, for their eyes were heavy. And he left them again, and went away, and prayed a third time, saying again the same words. Then cometh he to the disciples, and saith unto them, Sleep on now, and take your rest: behold, the hour is at hand, and the Son of man is betrayed into the hands of sinners. Arise, let us be going: behold, he is at hand that betrayeth me.

Hebrews 10:5-7—Wherefore when he cometh into the world, he saith, Sacrifice and offering thou wouldest not, but a body didst thou prepare for me; in whole burnt offerings and sacrifices for sin thou hadst no pleasure: Then said I, Lo, I am come (In the roll of the book it is written of me) to do thy will, O God.

I John 2:16-17—For all that is in the world, the lust of the flesh and the lust of the eyes and the vain glory of life, is not of the Father, but is of the world. And the world passeth away, and the lust thereof: but he that doeth the will of God abideth for ever.

Shall we pray:

Beloved Lord, we are so thankful that we can be here in Your presence. We praise You, Lord, for when You are present, anything can happen. With You nothing is impossible. So we praise You and worship You knowing that You can make this time an eye-opening and life-changing time for us all. We need You, Lord. We are moving so fast into deeper darkness, turmoil, and trouble. But You have promised to be with us to the end of the age. Therefore, we pray You will reach our hearts. We want to confess before You that without that anointing grace and power which You won for us on Calvary and made a living reality in the Person of the Holy Spirit, our words are just human words. But with that anointing, it can be Your voice that we hear. We ask for an anointing for the speaking and the hearing of Your word that Your will may be done amongst us. We ask it in the name of our Messiah, the Lord Jesus. Amen.

CHANGED INTO THE LIKENESS OF CHRIST

We have already spoken about two characteristics that are found in the kingdom. One is that we are to be conformed to the image of the Lord Jesus. Without being changed and

transformed into His likeness, there is no kingdom to talk about. The purpose of the Lord in coming into this world and in giving Himself on the cross was that you and I might be born again and have a new life. Thus, we might be able to grow from babyhood into childhood into adulthood, and become soldiers of our Lord Jesus the Messiah. But how few believers really grow! The reason is that there is no being changed into the likeness of the Lord Jesus. As we behold the glory of the Lord, as in a mirror, we are changed into His likeness from glory to glory. It is a capacity for glory that the Lord works and then a deeper capacity that He continues to work. In actual fact, the way He works that capacity for glory is tribulation, affliction, difficult circumstances, difficult relationships, and a thousand and one other things. But while He is in charge of our growth, of our progress, and of our training and education, we are growing. We are being changed into His likeness.

SERVICE IN THE KINGDOM

The second thing we talked about last night was service. The King is an absolute example and illustration of service. The Lord Jesus was a living sacrifice from the moment He was born. There would never have been a cross, a Calvary, if He had not chosen to be a living sacrifice from the moment He entered this world. That character of the Lord Jesus as King and as a Servant of the Father to serve the people of God is a marvelous example for every one of us believers. If He was a living sacrifice to save us, can we be anything else than a living sacrifice? We have to follow Him.

THE KING SEATED ON THE THRONE

Now I want to take you a step further. Here are two more characteristics of the kingdom of God. The first is essential. The character of the kingdom of God is all to do with the throne and the King seated on the throne. It is do with His will and His sovereign authority. The Lord Jesus said, "The Father has committed into My hands all authority and power both in heaven and on this fallen earth" (see Matthew 28:18). At this very moment, with all the darkness, turmoil, confusion and revolution that is on every side everywhere, He has sovereign authority. He rules in the kingdom of men. That throne of God and the King seated and enthroned above is all to do with the purpose of God, the fulfillment of the word of God, and the will of God.

Total Obedience to the Will of God

The Lord Jesus was totally obedient to His Father. He never disobeyed His Father. You have only to read the New Testament in a superficial manner to discover those words again and again, "I am come to do Thy will, O God." The meaning of His coming was to do the will of God, to fulfill the purpose of God, to bring a people into the salvation of God, to restore them to the purpose of God, and to give them hope of glory. That is the Lord Jesus. Everywhere you look in the New Testament, you will discover that He said: "I do not do My own will, but His will. I do not speak My own words, I speak His words. I do not do My own works; I work the work of the Father. So if that is the character of the King, it has to be the character of the kingdom. In other words, if you and I have been born of the Spirit of God, if by the grace of God we have been called to the throne of God, if we have been called to the kingdom of God, and called to reign with Him, not only now but in the ages to come, that

quality of our Lord Jesus has to be found in us. However young you are, however old you are, it is to do with total obedience.

It is not easy for many of us to accept this in reality. We all accept it theologically or academically. What does it mean? It means that you and I, saved by the grace of God, born of the Spirit of God, have to do the will of God if we are to be in union with the throne of God.

Not My Will But Thine Be Done

That passage we read in Matthew is the one time the Lord Jesus wondered whether there could be another way other than Calvary: "Let this cup pass from Me." Why did the Lord Jesus falter? What was it? It is so beyond our comprehension what He suffered in the Garden of Gethsemane. I think most people think Jesus only suffered on the cross, but in the Garden of Gethsemane He suffered so colossally that the gospels tell us He sweat drops of blood. We understand medically that that is close to death. It was the whole hierarchy of darkness and evil that centered upon the Lord Jesus in the Garden. He said, "My soul is exceedingly sorrowful unto death." In one of the gospels, we are told an angel came and ministered to Him (see Luke 22:43). Then we hear those amazing words: "Not as I will, but as Thou wilt." The battle was won.

There would have been no Calvary if Jesus had not uttered those words: "Not as I will, but as Thou wilt." That is the character of our King. He loved you and me so much, unbelievable as that seems, that He was prepared to go through the agony of the cross for us. Now we must remember that never in the whole being of God the Son had He ever been apart from God the Father. Never! I think the devil brought television-like pictures before His eyes of what it could mean to be forsaken, of what it could mean to be parted and divided from the Father. Those pictures that came before the Lord Jesus as a man horrified Him. But thank God that He said: "Not as I will, but as Thou wilt." He went to the cross of Calvary. He had won the battle of His being.

Dear child of God, we have no idea what the Lord Jesus suffered for you and for me. We take the Lord's Table so lightly, so easily. We take the bread and we drink the cup. We have no real idea what it cost the Lord Jesus. In the Hebrew in Psalm 40, it says, "I delight to do Thy will, O God." In the Greek version of our Old Testament, the Septuagint, it says, "I am come to do Thy will, O God." This is the character of the King, and it is the character of His kingdom.

I sometimes cringe a little when we sing these songs about being kings. Of course, we are kings. This is the amazing thing; the King has made us royal; He has made us kings. But it is not that we have an authority we can throw around, beat up the saints, or to behave as if we are bullies. We have authority and power; we are kings. But to be a king like the Lord Jesus is to be under the sovereign authority of God. To be a king like the Lord Jesus is to do the will of God.

How can we enter the kingdom of God if we do not do His will? How can we enter the kingdom of God and be what the King wants us to be if we do not do the will of God? This is the supreme problem of all human beings. "Oh," you say, "you are exaggerating and that is the trouble. It is because you have a Jewish background." I mean it; it is the supreme problem.

Adam & Eve's Fall By Deception

Do you remember how Satan came to Eve in his cunning deceitful way? He is very clever. He did not bother with Adam; he came to Eve. He knew if he got Eve, he had Adam which is in itself very interesting but I will not develop that matter. He came to Eve and said: "Has God said you shall die if you eat of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil?" Then he said, "You shall not surely die." This is how Satan gets many believers: "Has God said? It is not true. You have misunderstood." Then he said an incredible thing: "If you eat of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, you shall be as God." In the Hebrew it is: "You shall be as gods." "You do not have to do the will of God. You can do your own will. You can decide your own life. You can choose your own career. You can choose who you will marry. You can choose every single thing you want to do because you are as God." The authority has moved from the throne of God to you so that you are an authority in your own right. That is why we have such a mess in the world. We have thousands upon thousands of self-centered people. We are all self-centered.

There is no one who has from the moment they are born been a sweet, modest, humble person. It is a lie. If you think you are modest, it means you are very proud. If you think you are humble, then it means you are exceedingly proud. Do you remember the Christian who wrote the book "Humility" and how I attained to it?

S-I-N

I used to explain it like this: sin is the great problem. What is sin? It is disobedience to the will of God. God said something right at the very beginning to Adam and Eve, and they disobeyed. All the problems we have in the world come from it. S-I-N—I in the center—I think; I know; I feel; I want; I will. The whole of human history is the expression of this *I*. Every great dictator has a slightly larger *I* than the normal.

John the apostle wrote this: "The world passes away and its lust, but he that does the will of God abides forever." Let it sink into you. It is only when you and I surrender our will to the will of the Lord Jesus that we can begin to live the Christian life. The way we can live a kind of Christian life is religious—we dress it up and use the phraseology of Christians. It is all dos and don'ts, and there is a total absence of life.

When you and I are born again by the grace of God, into our being comes eternal life. That life joins us to the throne so that the character of the kingdom is the character of the Lord Jesus.

Now I do not want to beat you into the ground—not that I can. But if you have not surrendered your will to God, you cannot live the Christian life. You can only live a counterfeit Christian life. You can take communion, you can be baptized, and you can join the church as a member. But what does it mean?

C. T. Studd

When C.T. Studd, that great missionary, who had been a sportsman before he was saved, was dying, and he said to his son-in-law, Norman Grubb: "I know I have been a very difficult old man (and he was), but the one thing I can say is that all that the Lord has told me to do, by His grace and power I have done." That is how C.T. Studd died. That work of C.T. Studd has gone on in the biggest missionary fellowship in the world—WEC.

I came to the Lord through C.T. Studd. He was a difficult man. A dentist went all the way from Britain to the jungle bush of the Congo because he heard that C.T. was suffering from bad teeth. He looked at C.T.'s teeth, told him they were dangerous and they had to come out. He said, "I will make you a set of false teeth." C.T. accepted it, but he found the false teeth to be difficult. What did he do? He took the false teeth out, put them on his desk, and used it to prop his pens in. When a visitor would come, he quickly took the pens out and put the teeth in his mouth. He was a difficult man.

I remember a sister telling me, "We did some beautiful meals for him, and he would take the custard and plop it onto the chicken. And we would ask him: What are you doing?" He said, "When it gets down inside, it is all the same." He was a difficult man. But he did the will of God, and what he has done has lasted.

The Good, Perfect, Acceptable Will of God

It is a tremendous thing to surrender to the will of God. Have you surrendered to the will of God? If I am speaking to someone who is 30, 40, 50 years old in Christ, let me ask you: Have you surrendered your will to the will of God? For the young people—the biggest problem is your will. You want to choose what career you will have, the kind of life you will have, the kind of home you will have, who will be your wife or husband. You want to choose it by yourselves. Of course, we are not expecting the Lord to say, "You must marry so and so" and that one is the most ugly person you have ever met. No, that is not the will of God because God's will for us is good, perfect, and acceptable. But it is only when you and I become a living sacrifice that we can prove that God's will is good, perfect and acceptable.

Otherwise when we are still arguing as to whether we will do His or our will, we always think that His will is not good, not perfect, and not acceptable. We only discover when we let go of our own will and do His that in the end it is marvelous. There is nothing like doing the will of God.

Why do we have this problem? It is because of the big *I*. That is the root of the problem. We think that if we get our way and do what we think is good for us it would be marvelous. It will not! Your Savior died for you and because He loves you He only leads you into what is good for you, perfect for you, and acceptable to you. This is the character of the kingdom—to do the will of God.

Look over these thousands of years of church history and those who have done the will of God. It is incredible. I could give you so many stories. We have already heard about Hudson Taylor. What would it have been if he had done his own will, if he had followed his own will? Instead, he surrendered his will to God. What would it would have been if C.T. Studd, a famous cricketer and athlete in Britain, had held onto his career instead of sacrificing himself and surrendering his will?

Mary Slessor

I think of dear Mary Slessor of Calabar. She was so terrified of men, unlike some women who are not afraid of men but are like tanks. God help any man who stands in their way. But Mary Slessor was so humble naturally that when she spoke on a platform and men were present, she could not look at the congregation; she looked at the wall and spoke to the wall. God not only saved that woman, He called her to Africa. When she went to Africa, she could not bear to live in the bush in a bush hut. She could not bear to hear the cries of

little children in the middle of the night. She inquired about them and found out that whenever twins were born, they were thought to be demonic. So at birth they were taken by their mother or father and thrown into the bush for wild animals to eat. Mary Slessor began a work in Calabar. She went out every night looking for these twins and bringing them home with her. She formed orphanage after orphanage after orphanages. It is incredible that this lady, who was frightened of cows, horses, and men, could wander around in the bush in the middle of the night listening for the cries of twins and rescuing them.

At the end of her life, there was a big powwow between all the big chieftains. When they came together, they asked Mary Slessor if she would meet with them. "Yes," she said, "I will." They came wearing nothing but feathers and paint. This woman, who could not bear to look at a man, knitted from breakfast in the morning right the way through to when the sun began to set. Then she heard voices and knew exactly what it was. These were cannibals, and they did not want to sacrifice fighting with one another because it gave them human meat. She put her knitting down, went around the whole lot of them, and boxed their ears one by one. They signed a peace that lasted two hundred years. The Lord had said to Mary Slessor: "Queens shall bow before you." When Queen Elizabeth visited the Calabar, she went to see Mary Slessor's grave, and the queen did something extraordinary. She curtsied before the grave of Mary Slessor. It is so amazing to do the will of God.

Surrendering Our Will to the Lord

The greatest thing you can do in your life, other than to receive the Lord Jesus as Savior, is to surrender your will to the Lord while you are young. Let Him be Lord and King in your life. You will never regret it. The Lord will lead you into His will and His works. What I am saying is not a fairy tale; it is absolutely true. Without such surrender to the King, to His lordship, to His ownership, we have a civil war going on in our life. We may be saved but there will be no progress, no being changed into the likeness of the Lord Jesus. And it is all to do with the will.

Satan knew exactly what He was doing when He poisoned the mind of Eve. He knew that he was bringing a poison into her self-life that would not leave and through her it would go to the rest of us. We all descended from Adam and Eve. We have a really big problem with this matter of the will and it all started with Satan's deception.

When you and I surrender our will to the Lord, something really happens. The Lord promises to lead us; He promises to protect us; He promises to provide for us. It is so simple. We can either have our own way or His.

What did Jesus say? "My sheep hear My voice and they follow Me, and I give unto them eternal life." It is a living, continuous experience of the Lord Jesus. I cannot think of anything more wonderful than that in this world. I just cannot understand people who do not want to do the will of God. I am old enough now to have experienced what it is to have the leadership of the Lord, to have the protection of the Lord, to have the provision of the Lord. I would want that more than anything else.

THE ABSOLUTE FAITHFULNESS OF THE KING

The second thing I want to talk about that is a very real characteristic of the King is faithfulness. The King is absolutely faithful. You remember that wonderful promise in the

little book of Lamentations which is such a misery even in the way it is done in Hebrew. It is like a slow march at a funeral. Then suddenly in chapter 3 the sun comes out in all the darkness. "It is of the Lord's lovingkindness that we are not consumed because His compassions they fail not. They are new every morning. Great is Thy faithfulness. The Lord is my portion says my soul and I will wait for Him" (v. 22). How faithful the Lord is! We are not very faithful but the Lord is absolute faithfulness.

I have proved His faithfulness, and I know many of you have also. When I was baptized, I was given a verse in the Scripture by my old Sunday school teacher: "The Lord, it is He that does goes before thee, He will not fail thee nor forsake thee, fear not neither be dismayed" (Deuteronomy 31:8). That Scripture has come back to me again and again through my life. I have never found the Lord to fail. I have never found the Lord to forsake. I have given Him cause to forsake me but He has never forsaken me. This is one of the most amazing things about the King; He is absolutely faithful. This faithfulness of His is something so tremendous once you surrender and give your life wholly to Him, and not merely take what you can get—that is His salvation and His life. But if you are prepared also to be faithful, God gives us responsibilities to be faithful over, He gives stewardship to be faithful over, He calls us to a calling to be faithful over. He is faithful, and the character of the King is the character of the kingdom.

Abraham

I think of Abraham, the father of all who believe. My dear friend who is the former director of the International Christian Embassy said once in my hearing in a moment of true inspiration: "God put into Abraham the whole DNA of world redemption." I believe that was an inspired statement. After all, he is called the father of all who believe—not only Jews but also Gentiles who have found the salvation of God as a part of the new man. He is the father of us all. But when there was a famine, he did not remain in the land like Elijah. It was rather remarkable that Elijah got fed by ravens. Only the Lord knows what morsels they brought to him but they certainly were not kosher. But the little stream never dried up.

However, Abraham's faith failed, and he went down to the south to Egypt. When he got to Egypt, he called Sarah, who was apparently unbelievably beautiful, his sister. Pharaoh and his courtiers did not inquire too much because the Pharaoh himself rather fancied Sarah. What a mess Abraham got into—the father of faith! And the Lord had to get him out of it. The Lord was so faithful that he caused the whole family of Pharaoh to have some virus that gave them upset stomachs, headaches, and I don't know what else until they went to their miracle men and asked: "What is wrong?" The miracle men did all their magic and came up with the answer—Abraham. Then Pharaoh went to Abraham and asked: "Why have you done this to me?" Of course, Sarah was his half-sister; that is true. But it was a white lie, a half truth. It got Abraham into a lot of trouble; nevertheless, the Lord remained faithful.

Jacob

Then I think of Jacob. It is interesting that God never called the covenant people of God Abraham, or Isaac, or Moses or even David. He called them Jacob. Again and again the Lord said to His prophets: "O Jacob," speaking of the whole people. The word *Jacob* in Hebrew

means “twister.” It means someone who twisted around his twin brother's ankle as he was born. He was trying even then to come out first. Of course, they were twins. There was no elder or younger brother.

You know the story of Jacob and what a twister he was. He could not help it. He was filled with intelligence, business acumen, and much else. Everything he came into contact with, he had eyes like a till that rang cash. He saw immediately what the profit was in any situation that came up. When his brother came back from hunting exhausted and smelt the wonderful lentil soup that Jacob had prepared, Jacob said, “You will not have a drop of it until you give me your birthright.” And Esau sold his birthright for a pot of lentil soup. But there was something in Jacob deeper than his twistedness, deeper than his intelligence and acumen, and his incredible self. Even in his estimate of himself and his confidence in himself, there was something that somehow valued the things of God.

The Lord never left Jacob. He deceived his old blind father by a trick and a deceit that his mother, who loved him unbelievably, had worked out. He stole the blessing and then had to flee from his home. He never saw his mother again whom he loved so dearly. He fled all the way across the Middle East to the second greatest twister who was his uncle Laban. It ran in the family. They spent twenty-one years deceiving one another.

Then he worked all those years for Rachel and who did he get? Leah. They were all twisters. They must have had a family get-together and Uncle Laban said to his wife: “We will dress Leah up to look like Rachel and tell her to keep her big mouth shut, and watch how her sister walks and walk like her. We will dim the lights, and she will be in a veil from head to foot. He will not even see it is not his beloved Rachel.” When Jacob woke up the next morning, he found it was Leah and not Rachel.

But the Lord never left Jacob. He loved him all the way until he became Israel. He followed him. That is the faithfulness of the King. He never forsook him. He judged him, and he came into many problems because of his twistedness, but the Lord never left him. Isn't that incredible?

Dear Rachel

I will just mention Rachel. He thought Rachel could never have an evil thought go through her little head. But when Uncle Laban chased him with a posse of men and said, “Why did you leave? Could you not have stayed and at least said goodbye in a civil manner? And by the way, who stole the household gods?” These household gods were everywhere, and they were title deeds to property. That is a very interesting thought, isn't it? Rachel must have thought: “Dad is deceiving my husband. I am not going to get any inheritance for the children.” So she gathered up all of the idols she could, put them in a bag, and took them when they fled. Then dear Jacob said to Laban: “Search everything. I have never had anything do with household idols. I do not believe in them.” Laban searched everything and in the Hebrew it says that he felt everything because he could feel whether there was an idol under the cloth. Then he found dear Rachel sitting on the camel seat, and he said, “I must search everything.”

She said, “Yes, Papa, do that, but I am not feeling well.” “Oh,” he said, “I am sorry to hear that.”

“So don't bother me.”

"Of course I won't." He went all the way around and could not find them. All the time she was sitting on the household idols. Poor Jacob, first he found Laban to be a twister, then Leah, then the whole family, and then he found even his dear Rachel was a twister.

Finally, he was ready for the Lord to deal with him. That is when the Lord said, "What is your name?" He owned up and said, "My name is Jacob, meaning twister." God said, "You shall no longer be called a twister but a prince with God—Israel." Faithfulness.

David

What about David? The Lord even said of him, "a man after My own heart" (see Acts 13:22). But David fell terribly. If you read the story of David's fall, it was terrible. He actually planned the murder of Bathsheba's husband so that he could get Bathsheba. When Uriah died in a deliberate tactic that David had thought out, the prophet Nathan came to David and said: "What have you done?" It is interesting that Bathsheba became the mother of Solomon.

Faithful To the Lord in Small Things

It is amazing to find how faithful the Lord is. We are not like this with one another. As soon as we find there are faults in one another, we start withdrawing. The Word says something about esteeming one another better than ourselves. But we don't. We say, "Look at so and so. I do not know why the Lord saved them. It is an amazing thing to love the Lord and to know the Lord. In Psalm 37 it says, "A righteous man will fall but he will come up again because the Lord will deliver him" (see v. 24).

Again in Proverbs 24: "A man may fall seven times but he will get up" (v. 16). Oh, what faithfulness of the Lord that when you fall, He will pick you up; you will fall again, and He will pick you up; you will fall again until finally He gets you.

This is a characteristic of the King and of the kingdom. How faithful are you? How faithful am I? Are we faithful to the calling, the ministry, the responsibility, and the stewardship that God has given us? This is the character of the kingdom.

I remember there was an old brother in the company at Halford house who was the patriarch of WEC. We knew him as Daddy Reese. He was a Welsh speaker from the north of Wales. I remember one morning when he stood up at the Lord's Table, and he read something in Chronicles about the pillars in the temple. On the top of the pillars, which you could not see from looking up, was lily-work. And then he said, "Why did the Lord put lily-work where nobody could see it except Him? Is it not that we should be faithful over the responsibilities that we have been given by the Lord whether anyone sees it or not?" It is often only when we think other people see that we are faithful. But it is not what others see; only the Lord. To be a pillar in the house of our God is something, isn't it?

Peter

And then there is the apostle Peter. He was always the first to speak and always putting his foot in it. He was always saying what the rest of the disciples thought, but they did not have the courage to say it so they never got into trouble. When Peter said, "I will not let you die," the Lord said, "before the cock crows three times, you will have denied me." When that happened with Peter, it was like a nuclear explosion that blew away his self-manufactured Christian life. The whole thing was destroyed. But the Lord had said, "When you come

through this, strengthen your brothers.” In other words, the Lord Jesus was going to remain absolutely faithful. He said, “I have prayed for you Simon. Satan has desired to sift you as wheat, but I have prayed for you that your faith fail not.” Peter came through that experience. Brother Sparks used to say, “Satan got the chaff, and God got the wheat.” Peter came through to be the great apostle who opened the door to the Gentiles and much else. How faithful the Lord is! Isn't that something amazing to thank the Lord for? May God give us grace not only to know His faithfulness but to be faithful ourselves, for if we are faithful in small things, God will put us over much greater things.

Shall we pray:

Lord, bless this word to each one of us. Make it real, Lord. Help us to surrender our will to Yours, however young or old we are. Take this word and make it real. May we come to appreciate Your faithfulness in such a way that we become faithful. We remember, dear Lord, that you endured the cross for us. May we have that kind of steadfastness and determination to truly follow You to the end. We ask it in the name of Jesus. Amen.