

In the Name of the Father, and of the ✠ Son, and of the Holy Ghost.

Once again our Lord begins His teaching with a familiar introduction: “The Kingdom of Heaven is like...” What follows is always an earthly illustration taken not from the Kingdom of Heaven, but from the kingdoms of this world. We need to be taught what the Kingdom of Heaven is like because we are fallen.

God’s Ways are not our ways. The Wisdom of God and the Way of Salvation are counterintuitive for fallen men, unattainable. God does not desire that you be turned over to the torturers until you pay all that you owe Him. That would mean an eternity of torture, for your debt to God surpasses your ability to pay. That isn’t what God wants.

God will indeed settle accounts with each of you, individually and personally. That He will do because He is Holy, He is Righteous, and neither sin nor unrighteousness can stand before Him. That He will do on the Last Day, the Day of Judgment, the Day that comes soon.

Before that Day comes, God wants you to know what the Kingdom of Heaven is like because He desires that you be part of it. He wants you to be a citizen of that strong, eternal Kingdom of bliss and peace and joy. But until the Church Victorious is complete, He must teach about His Kingdom in parables, for as Solomon writes “Happy is the man who finds wisdom, and the man who gains understanding...” Which means that fallen men have neither wisdom nor understanding. They cannot understand the Kingdom of Heaven.

The world you live in is proof of it. The foolishness of sinful men pervades our society. Transgression and trespass, violations of God’s Holy Law, are counted as right and good. Perversion is called “love”. The “woke” and the “enlightened” disdain God and His Word, and live lives of lust and gluttony and hedonism, governed by man-made rules.

They make what is good bad, and what is bad good. They are enslaved by the changing doctrines of the world, ever in peril of violating ethical codes that shift like sand, in constant danger of condemnation for thoughts and speech that was counted as good only a few years ago, thoughts and speech that God counts as good.

Holding tightly to the mutable, fluctuating beliefs and desires of fallen men, they may win the approval of the sinful world, but they prevent themselves from entering the Kingdom of God. And that is to be delivered to the torturers for eternity, to be sentenced to that dark and agonizing place prepared for the devil and the fallen angels. Even though they may deny the existence of hell, still those who reject God and the Truth of His Word will suffer in it without relief, forever.

That you be saved from eternal suffering, in love, in mercy, your Lord teaches you what the Kingdom of Heaven is like. In the Kingdom of Heaven, great debt, immeasurable indebtedness, is forgiven with a word. Consider the servant summoned by the King – he fell down before Him and pleaded. He showed forth honest and heart-felt repentance, which is contrition and faith. Contrition is being ashamed of your sin, being truly sorry for your sin, being sickened by what you have thought and said and done, and being honestly determined to change your ways, to live differently, to put away godless works and live to please and honor God. That is true contrition. Without contrition, without repentance for your sins, you cannot enter the Kingdom of Heaven.

The second part of repentance is faith. While the servant was sorry, he did not believe. His actions showed it. Faith believes that the King is merciful. Faith believes that the King loves you, and wants only the best for you. Faith believes that in love, the Lord chastens. He corrects. For whom the Lord loves He corrects, so do not despise His chastening, nor detest His correction.

His chastening is designed to keep you from the fires of hell. For true Wisdom is a tree of life to those who take hold of her, and happy are all who retain her. Faith believes that God will forgive your immeasurable indebtedness. And faith extends that forgiveness to others. That is what the Kingdom of Heaven is like.

In Christ, your debt to God is paid. Your account is settled. The King proclaims you free. But your forgiveness was not free. It cost God the Son His life. He was counted as the most wicked of servants, because He bore your sins. He was shown no compassion. With your sin, in which He covered Himself, God the Father was angry. He was arrested. He endured a sham trial.

He was delivered to the torturers, until He paid all that was due the Father, until He paid for the sins of all men of all times. And the Master was moved by His atoning death, and because of Christ He forgives you all your sins. In the shed Blood of Christ your Savior, God forgives you all your sins. He proclaims you free.

Although He was shown no compassion, He shows compassion to you. He laid down His life, and took it up again. His miraculous resurrection is the source of your justification, your holiness. You believe that He died to pay for your sins, and believing, it is done unto you as you believe. You believe that He rose again from the dead, and believing, His righteousness is declared to be yours. Your account is settled.

Christ's salvation is more precious than rubies, and all the things you can desire cannot compare to Him. He is true Wisdom, the Wisdom of God, God Incarnate. By Him was the earth founded. By Him were the heavens established. His Ways are Ways of pleasantness, His paths are peace. He made the tree of death a tree of life for you, you who believe in Him, you who cling to Him for forgiveness and life.

You have been forgiven so much, you have been forgiven everything, faith cannot mark iniquities committed against you. Having received His boundless forgiveness, your faith extends that forgiveness to others. So you bless those who persecute you. You forgive those who trespass against you, as He has taught you to pray: "...forgive us our trespasses, as we forgive those who trespass against us."

On the cross He bore your sins. He was judged in your stead. On the Last Day there is only vindication for you in Christ. This day He brings the Fruits of His Cross to you. He places His Body into you. He streams His shed Blood into you. You eat and drink, that by His Mysteries you may be sincere and without offense till the day of Christ, being filled with the fruits of righteousness which are by Christ Jesus, to the glory and praise of God.

And He who has begun a good work in you will complete it until the day of Jesus Christ. That, dear Christian, is what the Kingdom of Heaven is like.

St. Matthew 18:21-35
The Fourth Sunday after Michaelmass, 2019 A.✠ D.

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