

The God of the Mountains (5) **Citizens of the Kingdom (2)**

It is interesting to note that in reading the Gospel of Matthew, the subject of the Father in heaven and the believer's relationship with Him is first introduced in those chapters which we refer to as "*The Sermon on the Mount*", chapters 5-7. This is seen in particular detail in chapter 6, where all actions and motives come under the divine examination of the heavenly Father.

The Lord said to Abraham, "*I am the Almighty God, walk before me and be thou perfect*" (Gen. 17:1). The divine title, "*the Almighty God*", is translated from the Hebrew, "*El Shaddai*", which means, "*the All Sufficient One*". The word, "*perfect*", as it is used in this particular occurrence, means, "*upright*", or, "*sincere*".

This is quite interesting in the light of Matthew chapter 6, where the citizens of the Kingdom are to walk with pure heart and motives, in the sight of the heavenly Father. He sees all that is done and knows the motives behind each and every action and will reward accordingly in a coming day.

In the first half of the chapter, the King addresses three essential areas of practical righteousness in the lives of the citizens of the kingdom. These are, giving of alms, or acts of mercy and kindness, prayer and fasting. He warns against performing any of these things with the motive of being seen by others and seeking the praise of men.

As citizens of the kingdom of Heaven, we need to understand that there is a certain conduct that is expected of us. Paul exhorted the believers in Thessalonica regarding their walk and testimony in the world, "*That ye would walk worthy of God, who hath called you unto his kingdom and glory*" (1st Thess. 2:12).

Our giving should be marked by sincerity and done as unto the Lord. Matthew wrote of a coming day of reward when the King will review all that is done in this life, "*And the King shall answer and say unto them, Verily I say unto you, Inasmuch as ye have done it unto one of the least of these my brethren, ye have done it unto me*" (Matt 25:40).

Our prayer life should be marked by spiritual priorities. Believers have a relationship with God through the Lord Jesus and the work of reconciliation through His precious blood shed, which allows them to call upon God as their Father.

We acknowledge our heavenly Father as sovereign ruler over all creation and seek His will and the advancement of His kingdom here on earth, while we express the desire to see and share in the kingdom that is approaching. We confess our dependence upon Him to meet our daily needs. While we pray for forgiveness for those that wrong us, we pray for preservation, in order that we might live holy lives, befitting the citizens of the heavenly kingdom.

Fasting, or abstaining from things to satisfy physical needs, does not merit any favour from God. It is a personal and private choice between an individual and God and not to be paraded before the eyes of men. It is often a deep exercise of heart and soul to earnestly determine the will of God in certain matters. There is nowhere in the New Testament where fasting is commanded. If our self-denial is going to accomplish anything, it should always be done from a sincere motive and should always be accompanied by prayer.

Our motive for doing anything should be to seek to please our heavenly Father. We should not be as the Pharisees, of whom John wrote, "*they loved the praise of men more than the praise of God*" (Jn. 12:43)

All that we say and do is known to our God and King, Paul exhorted in his letter to the Colossians, *“whatsoever ye do, do it heartily, as to the Lord, and not unto men”* (Col. 3:23). His advice to servants and their attitude toward their earthly masters applies to all believers in every area of their service to the King, *“Not with eyeservice, as menpleasers; but as the servants of Christ, doing the will of God from the heart”* (Eph. 6:6).

The heavenly Father has promised a reward, for all that is done for Him from sincere and pure motives; abundant blessings in this present life and an inheritance in the future. The writer of the epistle to the Hebrews encourages us with this reminder, *“For God is not unrighteous to forget your work and labour of love, which ye have shewed toward his name, in that ye have ministered to the saints, and do minister”* (Heb. 6:10). Paul wrote similarly in the book of Colossians, *“Knowing that of the Lord ye shall receive the reward of the inheritance: for ye serve the Lord Christ”* (Col. 3:24).

The chapter concludes with a warning from the King against storing up material possessions and riches here on earth. He stresses the insecurity and temporary nature of earthly treasures compared with that which is heavenly and eternal. The apostle Paul reminds us, *“the things which are seen are temporal (temporary and passing); but the things which are not seen are eternal”* (2nd Cor. 4:18).

Paul also warned of the danger of being covetous, *“But they that will be rich fall into temptation and a snare, and into many foolish and hurtful lusts, which drown men in destruction and perdition”* (1st Tim. 6:9).

It is clear from these verses that we must choose between the material possessions of this world, which are temporary and that which is of spiritual and eternal value. The King warns, *“where your treasure is, there will your hearts be also”*. The apostle Paul exhorts, *“set your affection on things above, not on things upon the earth”* (Col. 3:2).

The King also warns against being overly anxious about the future, how we will be provided for, particularly in terms of food and clothing. We cannot grow taller by worrying about our physical stature, so we should not be concerned about the future, since our heavenly Father cares for us and knows our every need and is able to provide for us.

Paul exhorts us in the book of Philippians, *“Be careful (anxious) for nothing; but in every thing by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known unto God”* (Phil. 4:6). Peter advised similarly, *“Casting all your care (anxieties) upon him; for he careth for you (it matters to Him about you)”* (1st Pet. 5:7).

Lastly, the King urges the citizens of the kingdom, *“Seek ye first the kingdom of God and his righteousness and all these things shall be added unto you”*. This statement means that spiritual matters must have priority over material things in the lives of the citizens of the kingdom of heaven. It means seeking to live righteously, in a manner that is consistent with God’s holy standards and character.

Living with eternal values in view will ensure that all the necessities of life will be amply provided for and that the future will be secure. The apostle Paul wrote, *“my God shall supply all your need according to his riches in glory by Christ Jesus”* (Phil. 4:19).

*On mountain top such words so plain,
We hear the Sovereign give;
The truth of God we must maintain,
How citizens should live.*

*All that is done in service here,
Before the Father's gaze;
We live our lives in Godly fear,
And serve Him all our days.*

*Not for position or acclaim,
Or the applause of man;
To glorify the Sovereign's Name,
Be this our master plan.*

*No anxious thought, of life's demands
Shall tarry in our breast;
We leave our cares in God's great hands
And in His promise rest.*

*No earthly need escapes His eye,
Our heavenly Father knows;
From His vast store, a full supply
His boundless love bestows.*

*So let us then, while in this place,
Towards the kingdom press;
As citizens of matchless grace,
And seek His righteousness.*

Bernie Payne