



# The Sword And The Kingdom

The following message is taken from the experience of a very zealous disciple. His primary objective was to do the will of God and he pursued this goal with all of his might. This man was a follower of a teacher named Jesus who journeyed throughout the land proclaiming good news about the kingdom of God. His message was that this kingdom was near at hand.

In fact, this Jesus had let it be known to His intimate associates that He was God's anointed vessel to establish this heavenly kingdom on the earth. Not only this but it was also understood by those who followed Him that His close companions were under consideration for positions of leadership and authority in this kingdom which was to be set up. All this fueled the fire within our zealous brother to see that his leader's will was carried out and that others would both understand His program and also come into line with it.

What a picture had been painted for him – both from the Old Testament and also from Jesus' teachings – of what this wonderful kingdom was to be like. Peace would reign on the earth. The enemies of Israel – God's enemies – would be subdued. All forms of unrighteousness would be eliminated. Justice, truth and humility would supersede tyranny, lying and pride. All kinds of social evils including poverty, famine and oppression would be cleared up by God's personally chosen representative.

Even the course of nature would be changed so that wild animals would no longer eat each other and poisonous snakes would become harmless. Just imagine such a world where tranquility and harmony between men, nature and their God prevailed. It truly sounds like Paradise.

So you can well understand our brother's enthusiasm for this project. Here, under the leadership of this miracle working teacher, the prospect of an idyllic, righteous, God-centered, world-encompassing kingdom seemed just within his grasp. What an opportunity!

However, somewhere along the line, things seemed to be going wrong. The huge crowds that at one time had followed Jesus appeared to be melting away. Their excitement waned when He did not accept their crown or undertake to feed them perpetually. Not only this but the religious leaders were becoming increasingly restive and even downright hostile.

Rumors were even circulating that they were trying to have Jesus killed. And the Teacher himself did not seem to be seizing the opportunities which came along to gather an army or confront the Romans with force. Lately He had begun to talk very strangely about being crucified and other equally unintelligible things.

This brother knew that Jesus had supernatural power. He had seen it demonstrated many times before. There was no doubt that He was anointed and chosen by God – a man like Moses, a man to lead God's people.

Nothing short of audible voices from heaven had confirmed this fact. There could be no question that this was the right man to follow, but somehow things were not going according to the plan – at least not according to his plan.

So when the religious official's representatives appeared in the garden along with a motley crowd of others, he had to do something. If Jesus wouldn't defend Himself, then he would just have to do it for Him. Common sense told him that much. He could not simply stand there and watch all that Jesus came to do ended without a fight. In order to see the dream which had been instilled in his heart brought to fruition, this opposition had to be eliminated.

Without a doubt, God's will had always been accomplished through men of courage and determination. Surely Jesus must be waiting for His followers to take some action and use the resources at their disposal to see that God's heavenly order was established. So..., with some such thoughts circulating through his mind, our brother Peter drew out his sword and cut off the High Priest's servant's ear. Peter had effected a great and mighty deliverance.

Jesus' reaction to this was startling. Instead of jumping into the fray or encouraging the others to do so, He quietly instructed Peter to put his sword away. And then, as if to further emphasize His point, He healed the servant's ear.

The effect of this combined with all that followed – the night of trial, the angry crowds, and then the crucifixion of his leader – must have been devastating to our brother. All his dreams were shattered.

Evidently God did not mean to do what Jesus had been talking about. All this talk of idyllic kingdoms, social justice, righteousness – all had been for nothing. How could this have happened? How could the Almighty God have allowed evil to prevail and His Anointed to fail?

It seemed so obvious what needed to be done and what should have been done, yet Jesus appeared to be oblivious to it. Sometimes He seemed to be living in another world entirely. I imagine that the misery and depression which settled into Peter's heart as he meditated on these things must have been crushing.

## AN IMPORTANT LESSON

But through all this, our Lord was making for Peter and all the rest of us a very significant point. It is a lesson of extreme importance about which no Christian should be ignorant. In fact, it is my prayer that through this writing, this lesson could impact our lives and thinking as forcefully as it did our brother Peter's.

The key to understanding the way in which God is working – the explanation for why Jesus behaved the way He did – is found in His simple answer to Pontius Pilate. Please pay careful attention to this. He said: "My kingdom is not of this world". He goes on to explain that if His kingdom were of this world that His servants would fight, as Peter attempted to do, to establish and maintain it.

However, "now" He said, "Now My kingdom is not from here" (Jn 18:36). Nothing could be plainer. Although Jesus had been preaching and teaching about a heavenly kingdom which was to appear upon this earth "now" was not the time for it.

Naturally this gives rise to a very important question. It is: “When is the time for this kingdom?” This question is crucial because, depending upon the answer to it, our activities as followers of Jesus Christ would be very different.

If, on the one hand His kingdom is now here, then according to the unmistakable words of Jesus in John 18:36, we should be doing everything within our power to establish a righteous order on this planet.

This would include such things as voting, marching, protesting, organizing, running for election to public offices and even the use of force to bring about what Jesus manifestly taught. Just as the Children of Israel used every means at their disposal to conquer the land of Canaan, so we too would be required to do our utmost to bring about what we know God’s will to be. But if on the other hand, “now” is not the time for His kingdom to come in this way, then an entirely different set of activities might be in order.

In view of this it seems important for us to discover from the scriptures exactly what God’s timetable is. Just as with our brother Peter, it would not only be embarrassing but futile, and possibly even destructive, for us to be caught trying to do something which God was not doing.

To answer this question, we need only to look around us and see if the signs of this idyllic, heavenly kingdom as revealed to us in the word of God are evident in the world. To begin we might inquire if we see Jesus reigning physically upon the earth from the city Jerusalem as required by Is 24:23, Mic 4:7 and Rev 11:15 as well as many other scriptures. Next we might ask whether we are reigning with Him (Rev 20:4; 5:10, II Tim 2:12).

Then we would look for the twelve Apostles sitting on twelve thrones judging the twelve tribes of Israel (Mt 19:28). Surely if this were the kingdom about which Christ spoke we would find ourselves feasting with Abraham, Isaac and Jacob (Mt 8:11).

Additionally, all wars would have ceased (Is 2:4), carnivorous animals would now be herbivorous (Is 11:7), serpents would eat dust (Is 65:25), thorns and briars would no longer grow (Is 55:13), premature death would be a thing of the past (Is 65:20) and our enemy Satan would be bound helpless in the pit (Rev 20:2).

Not only this but all the nations would be obedient to the will of God and righteousness would reign everywhere (Is 32:1). (It should be understood here that these are just a small representative sample of the many manifestations of the kingdom given to us in the Bible.) If all this and much more describes the world in which you live, then we (or at least you) are living in the days of this heavenly kingdom.

Ah, but some will say, “God is depending upon us to carry these things out and establish such a kingdom. How can we stand still while we see injustice, poverty, abortion, pornography and other such things all about us? We can’t just sit around and wait for God to do something. It’ll never happen that way. After we (with God’s help of course) set things right, then Jesus can return and clean up any loose ends. We will have prepared things for Him.”

Poor brother Peter, he didn’t understand God’s plan either. He was not able until later to fathom the depths of the Divine design. It was only after all his own efforts had failed that he was ready to learn how to carry out the will of God in this age. However, the encouraging thing is that this brother became one of the chief workers towards establishing Jesus’ invisible, present kingdom. Once he found out how, he became an effective instrument in God’s hand.

I believe that any honest seeker of God, who has no position to defend, will agree that we do not see God’s kingdom of righteousness here today. The only conclusion to which we can truthfully come is that Jesus’ “now” is still in effect. “Now” His kingdom is not yet here. It is something we are looking for someday.

Since this is so, it behooves us for our own sake as well as for His, to look a little further into God’s word to see if we can discover exactly where we are in His plan and how we should be conducting ourselves. If we are to be faithful, productive servants, we must both understand and then work in harmony with the plans of our Leader.

## GOD'S PRESENT KINGDOM

With this in mind I would like to state as clearly as possible what I believe to be a Divine principle which will serve to guide us in our understanding of God’s

work. It is this: God's present work in our world is going on within and is centered upon the hearts of men. Today, His is not an outward kingdom. It does not come with "observation" (Lk 17:20).

It is a secret, invisible work going on within the inward parts of men and women everywhere. These "earthen vessels" are undergoing a hidden, supernatural change which, although it does have its evidence in the physical world, is not really of this world.

The kingdom or the rulership of God is right now being established, not on this planet, but in the hearts of men. This point should be abundantly evident to anyone who reads and seeks to understand the scriptures.

Now why is God doing things in this way? One explanation could be that He has begun working in the most difficult area first. The course of nature can be changed in a moment. Nations can be subdued in a few days. Oh, but the wicked, deceitful, rebellious heart of man! What a problem it is to God and His eternal plans.

If Jesus is going to subjugate the earth to the will of God, He must first conquer the hearts of men and women. Someday soon our Lord is returning to establish His kingdom here. This is part of what He taught us to pray for. But in order to do so, He desires to have a large contingent of followers to aid Him in this task. It goes without saying that no one can set up any kind of effective administration unless he has qualified people to fill the positions available.

In the same way, Jesus cannot fill the positions of responsibility in His coming kingdom with those whose hearts are not fully submitted to Him. He cannot subdue the rebellious earth with other rebels as His representatives.

First of all, before He can proceed with His plan, He must have a good number of followers upon whom He can rely completely. When these are fully ready, then He can come back and establish His authority over all the earth.

The foregoing understanding should be of great value to us in ascertaining what our present task is as followers of Jesus. Since He is now working with men on the inside, we as His co-laborers, must work in this area also. This should be

our point of focus and concentration. Our responsibility is to help prepare our hearts along with the hearts of many others for His soon return.

But some may ask: “Shouldn’t we feed the hungry, clothe the naked, heal the sick and other such things? Aren’t we responsible for making our society fit to live in?” My answer to such questions would be this: We are not free to make our own choices in this matter. It is not our responsibility to pick out some social ills or other needs which strike our fancy and then try to meet them in the name of Jesus.

The Bible makes it very clear that there are many works which are considered, both by the world and the Church, to be very good that will be rejected by Jesus on judgment day (Mt 7:22,23). We are taught in II Corinthians 10:4 that the weapons of our warfare are not carnal. They are not earthly.

Today God’s kingdom is spiritual and we must be doing spiritual work to be truly involved in it. Worldly methods and fleshly energy can do nothing to promote the interests of God. Furthermore, such efforts will one day be exposed as self-motivated and futile.

## THE LESSON OF CHURCH HISTORY

Church history is full of examples of such unauthorized activity. How many of those who have gone before us have been tempted to take the matters of the kingdom into their own hands. Several of those whose names today are revered by the Christian Church, employed armies to murder other believers whose doctrine was contrary to theirs.

Masses of the “faithful” marched again and again to the “Holy Land” to free it from the infidels. In the United States some years ago many believers spent volumes of energy to make drinking alcohol illegal. They marched, protested and rallied. Many preachers and evangelists joined the fray. At one point, their efforts to establish a superficial righteousness seemed to work. Laws were enacted. The consumption of alcohol was forbidden. Yet, this “success” did not last. The hearts of

men and women had not been changed. So, after a few short years, these laws were repealed. All this fleshly effort in the name of Jesus was in vain.

More recently thousands of people expended countless hours and put forth untold effort in order to force one chain of stores to quit selling pornography. Perhaps even more resources have been employed attempting to stop abortion. All this and much, much more has been and is being done by well-meaning Christians who imagine that they are serving God – just like Peter.

I think it will be worth our while to examine the outcome of the above mentioned examples. It is possible that many of my readers may be unsure that such things are not God's will. But let us look to see if God's purposes have been furthered by them.

How many hearts were changed by the armies of the Church? How many infidels were converted to Christianity? During the Prohibition days, how many turned to Christ as a result of the legislation against alcohol? How much less pornography is now in the world as a result of the 7-11 stores' decision not to sell it? Have the hearts of multitudes of men been changed?

How about the anti-abortion efforts. Has the moral fiber of the country been altered? Have people turned en masse toward God? Has revival broken out? I think not. These results speak for themselves. Fleshly, earthly efforts to bring about righteousness and the Kingdom of God are doomed to fail.

I do not mean to focus on these particular items as examples of spiritual impotency. They are only mentioned as representative samples of the countless endeavors engaged in by well-meaning believers which have not furthered the expansion of the kingdom of God. They have been a complete waste of time. Even worse, they have been done in rebellion against God.

I'm sure that some will point out that a few people were brought to Christ by those picketing outside the convenience stores and that some unwed mothers were saved from one particular sin or even a few saved themselves.

Yet these facts only serve to support my point. If all the effort expended in the above mentioned projects would have been directed towards changing men's

hearts instead of laws or outward situations, how much more lasting, spiritual results would there have been? What would have happened if all the man-hours of picketing would have been spent in prayer or in door to door witnessing? What would the effect on the world and the church have been if the Christians working towards anti-abortion legislation had instead devoted themselves to reaching the over 2 billion people who have never heard the gospel once? How much more could have been done to further God's purposes if only these believers were laboring according to His plan?

There is no doubt that genuine, powerful revivals have often brought about changes in the laws and activities of societies. Church history also gives us ample evidence of this. However, it should be equally plain that changes in legislation and/or social climate have never precipitated a revival. It has never happened the other way around. It is only as the hearts of men are changed that any meaningful changes take place in their society. It is only when repentance from sin is central to the work, that God's purposes are really furthered.

While it is lawful for us to use the fashion of this world to work for God, we are warned not to abuse it. No alteration of the superficial situation in our country or locality will be of any eternal value. Well-fed people can still end up in the lake of fire. Mothers saved from murdering their unborn children will be there too if they are not converted. Alcoholics who have not touched a drop in years can still be unregenerated.

I'm sure this point is unmistakable: If we do not reach inside the hearts of those whom we are laboring to help, then we have not given them anything worthwhile. Worse still is the fact that we have been squandering precious time which God wants to use for His kingdom.

I realize that the "needs" of the world can tug strongly on the strings of our all-too-human hearts. When we learn of the suffering of famine victims or read about the millions of unborn babies being slaughtered in almost every country around the globe, these things can provoke us to want to do something about it. Just like Peter, our natural man feels compelled to react to these apparent needs. We feel as if we simply cannot ignore these needs.

Quite often, this tendency is promoted by some preacher or article which tries to draw us into an involvement (usually financial) in some particular effort.

However, we must seek the face of God until we become motivated primarily, as Jesus was, by the deepest of human needs – the need of the heart to be filled with God. We must obey His command, put away our “swords” and work according to His plan.

## GOD'S SOLUTION

Our Lord did not ignore outward suffering. We have ample evidence of this throughout the four Gospels. But His primary purpose in the miracles which He performed was to point men to the answer to their deeper spiritual needs.

His ultimate mission was not to feed, heal and deliver the world physically. He realized only too well that these were temporary solutions to a much greater problem.

His reason for coming was to save the world from the horrible plague of sin – the root cause of all human problems – and lead men back to God.

When understood correctly, every outward sign which Jesus did becomes a graphic picture of some kind of inner human need which He desires to meet in us. Blindness, disease, crippling infirmities and even death all have their parallels within the human breast. Jesus came to change hearts and change them in such a radical, eternal way that, in time, even the world would be impacted by it.

I am not in this writing trying to discourage Christians from being involved in the world around them. Exactly the opposite is true. There is more work than ever to be done today in the harvest fields. Meeting physical needs, for example distributing food and clothing can be a powerful vehicle through which to preach the good news.

Christians are instructed to maintain good works (Tit 3:8). Galatians 6:10 teaches us to “...do good to all, especially to those who are of the household of

faith.” However, I am concerned that we do not become entangled in worldly work. Ours is a spiritual message. Ours is a heavenly goal.

We should only spend our time, money and energies on endeavors which promote God’s heavenly kingdom. While the sufferings of this life may provide for us an opportunity to serve others and bring them to Jesus, we must never lose sight of God’s objective – to prepare the hearts of men for His soon return.

Please remember, it is often much easier for the flesh to do outward, worldly “good deeds” than to engage in truly spiritual activity. How many believers today are trying to salve their consciences by becoming involved in “church work,” social reform or other religious projects while all the time their hearts are not really submitted to Jesus. Even unbelievers can sometimes change outward circumstances through their fleshly means.

But God’s real kingdom work today is neither outward or fleshly. Truly spiritual work is something much different. It requires that those doing it have an intimate relationship with God. It demands relinquishing control of our lives to Him. It involves all of those things about which Jesus was teaching but which Peter didn’t understand.

Experiencing the cross, self-denial, not seeking worldly influence or power – these are the kinds of hidden things which God is using today to build His kingdom. Such experiences are indispensable if we are to have true heart changing, kingdom-producing power.

It may be that some of my readers will be offended by what I have been saying. It is possible that this word has touched the situations of a few. The truth is that this message has been on my heart for years but I have put off writing it because I knew that it might be controversial and offensive.

But, dear brothers and sisters, please do not be put off by these things but take them to the Lord in prayer. Please regard them as the admonition of a friend who has your best interest at heart.

If I am wrong to insist upon putting the hearts of men first as I believe God is doing, I pray that He will show me. On the other hand, if you are wasting His time and even rebelling against Him, only you will bear the consequences.

My dear friends, please remember that in all these things, God must be preeminent. He is in charge and it is His will we must be doing.

Therefore, let us put away our fleshly swords and follow Him, doing His work in His way. We have His assurance that one day soon He will return and set right the many things that so grieve us in our world.

By David W. Dyer

This pamphlet is also included in the book “Seeds” and is available free of charge on the website [www.agrainofwheat.com](http://www.agrainofwheat.com)

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