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Sermon preached by Mr. J. Delves at "Ebenezer" Clapham on Sunday evening 30.9.73

Hymns 1105, 331, 257

Reading: Luke 12 from v. 15-40

Text: Luke 12.31.

"But rather seek ye the kingdom of God; and all these things shall be added unto you".

The connection between this verse and the subject of this morning (Luke 10.42) is very clear, they are very closely linked together; for as we have considered the case of Mary who chose that good part that shall not be taken away from her, so we can say that to choose that good part is "rather to seek", or as in another Gospel, "Seek ye first the kingdom of God, and his righteousness; and all these things shall be added unto you". To choose the good part that Mary chose is wrapped up in this verse, in seeking first the kingdom of God, and putting our trust in Him for matters of lesser or secondary importance. In verse 30 the Lord speaks of the things the nations of the world as such seek after, that is they only seek after material or earthly things - that is the nations of the world as such, not the godly among them - but the world seek earthly things. We have to see this in relation to the government of our land, and this is according to the course of nature, to seek the things the nations of the world seek after. In what we have read we observe that the Lord knoweth that we have need of these things. It does not say, 'Ye have no need of them', but that "Your Father knoweth that ye have need of them". Therefore the matters that come into our everyday life are those things which our heavenly Father knows that we have need of. It is a mercy to feel this, and to feel that we have a Father in heaven Who fully understands and supplies the needs of His people upon the earth, who put their trust in Him, and seek rather the kingdom of God. This was the case with Mary who chose that good part of which the Lord said it should not be taken away from her. It was grace given to Mary to choose that good part, which was to result in her future and everlasting good; and would never be taken away from her. As we look upon people in a general way we do not find many making a choice

like Mary, and are rather seeking the kingdom of God. If they were, if the Word and precepts of God were in the hearts of the people, there would not be all this lawlessness, bombing, robbery and murder, that is going on in these days. What a mercy if we are of that little flock referred to here in verse 32 to whom a kind word is given, "Fear not, little flock; for it is your Father's good pleasure to give you the kingdom", the kingdom you are seeking after. The Lord kindly encourages them to seek this kingdom, and confirms them that it is their Father's good pleasure to give it to them, "But rather seek ye" - as though the Lord would say, Your heavenly Father knoweth all your needs and will provide for them, put your trust in Him, and be prayerfully exercised about more lasting and vital realities, "rather seek ye the kingdom of God".

There is a point in this expression which indicates that it is of great importance. We read of the disciples who came unto the Lord and said "Even the devils are subject unto us through thy name". They appear to have some joy in this, but the Lord said unto them, "Rejoice not, that the spirits are subject unto you; but rather rejoice, because your names are written in heaven"; "rather seek ye the kingdom of God", let that be the first thing. This "rather" is referred to in relation to the Lord's resurrection where the Apostle says, "It is Christ that died, yea rather, that is risen again, who is even at the right hand of God". It conveys a particular import, "rather that is risen again", and so here, "rather seek ye the kingdom of God", indicating that to be a subject of the kingdom of God is of far greater importance and of greater value than any earthly kingdom can be.

What are we to understand by the kingdom of God? We can well understand what is involved in an earthly kingdom where there is a king and subjects and laws, but the kingdom here is the kingdom of God, or the kingdom of heaven, and that is different from any earthly kingdom. The Apostle writing to the Romans tells us what the kingdom of God is; he says "The kingdom of God is not meat and drink; but righteousness, and peace, and joy in the Holy Ghost"; these are its characteristics. Oh that we could see more of it in England. The kingdom of God is a kingdom of righteousness, and that

not merely as in relation to the life and deportment of the subjects of this kingdom, although it does have a point, for the subjects of this kingdom of God are not like the nations of this world who run after the things of the world, but the subjects of the kingdom of God seek after the blessings of that kingdom, and this is one of them - righteousness - although they may feel much that is bad and opposite in themselves. May not this refer to the righteousness of Christ that covers every subject of this kingdom, for properly speaking they all stand washed in His precious blood and clothed in His spotless righteousness. This then is a feature of the kingdom of God, and I venture to say that the subjects of this kingdom have more happiness even in the Lord's temporal mercies and blessings, than many worldly people do. When you are blessed in your soul, it will also sanctify the Lord's temporal blessings and dealings with you. Here then is a kingdom of righteousness, in which the subjects stand clothed in the righteousness of Christ, what a blessed kingdom is this. There is another characteristic of the kingdom of God - Peace. What kind of peace is this? I would say it is a spiritual peace, a peace that is made for them and given to them. We read of the Lord Jesus that He made peace by the blood of His cross, He says, "My peace I give unto you". This is a feature of the kingdom of God. It is a great mercy to have peace in our land; and we are not now at war with another nation, our young people have not to be on the battle-fields at the risk of their lives, as some of us were in our young days, some in the last war and some in the first war. We have peace in our land in that sense, and that is a great mercy; but this peace is of a higher nature than anything pertaining to this life; it is that peace the Spirit of the Lord brings into the hearts of the Lord's people when He appears, when the atonement is applied, then they will feel something of that peace that passeth all understanding. This peace then is a feature of the kingdom of God. There is another feature of the kingdom of God, and that is joy. I know the people of this world have their joy, they take delight in the joys and pleasures of this world, but they do not know anything about what real joy is, the joy that is referred to here. They run their ways, they have their revelries, as some people do that that live quite close to us and disturb their neighbour's rest until

the early hours of the morning, but what is all this empty vanity, it will all come to a sad, sad end? But in the kingdom of God there is a joy, it is a wonderful joy in God through our Lord Jesus Christ. The Apostle refers to it in the Epistle to the Romans. He says "And not only so, but we also joy in God through our Lord Jesus Christ, by whom we have now received the atonement". If you are really exercised in your soul, if you feel the burden of your guilt before a holy and just God, and should be favoured to feel a sense of His pardoning love, you will know what this joy is; and some of you do. Oh what a sweet joy it is! This is a joy that death will not break or sever or terminate; it is a joy felt a little here and there in our earthly pilgrimage, but it is a joy that will be entered into fully and everlastingly, world without end, one day.

Here then is the kingdom of God - it is righteousness, peace and joy in the Holy Ghost. Are we really seeking after this kingdom? Is it in your heart to seek first things first? Things that are of first importance? Is it in your heart and mine to seek first the kingdom of God. We may enjoy the Lord's earthly blessings in a right way, but this is a soul matter, it is a matter that concerns our never-dying souls. Are we really seeking first the kingdom of God? In Matthew the Lord says, "Your heavenly Father knoweth that ye have need of all these things". But seek ye first the kingdom of God, and his righteousness; and all these things shall be added unto you". A kingdom indicates authority, a king ruling, a reigning power. Who is king in this Kingdom? The Lord Jesus Christ; He reigns over all the kingdoms of the earth really, they are all under His supreme control, but this kingdom of God that we are exhorted to seek, because of its greater importance, this kingdom of God has three striking characteristics. First of all there is the kingdom of providence, that is of the Lord's providence over all people, but in a particular sense to His redeemed people, and His care for them. It has always been the privilege of the Lord's people to watch the hand of divine providence in their lives, in the circumstances of their lives. In the 107th. Psalm we have something about providence;

there is a people referred to of whom it is recorded that they are the redeemed of the Lord, and that, "He led them forth by the right way, that they might go to a city of habitation". In this leading forth in that right way are a variety of providences, there was in the case of the people in this Psalm, we find that they were brought into trouble, they fell down and there was none to help them, they were continually in some trouble or other, but in their trouble they cried unto the Lord, and the Lord delivered them. Many things like this come into the providences of the Lord's dear people.

There is an exhortation to be content with such things as we have, and to enjoy them, to be content with them and not to be covetous, or to envy others. I knew a friend very intimately, in fact he lodged with us in my parents home for quite a long time, but eventually he took over a small holding and the Lord went before him to prosper him and he got on very well; but he seemed to have the idea that the producers had all the labour, and the shop-keeper all of the profit, and eventually, although he was doing very well, he gave up his small-holding and took a little shop in Tunbridge Wells, and started a green-grocer's business where he lost all his savings and came to nothing. How much better it would have been if that good man had been content with his little smallholding that contained a number of fruit trees. That was something he understood, but the green-grocer business in a town he did not understand. As we look back many things may strike our minds in relation to the Lord's leading, and His providence over us, some things where we may have erred and made a mistake, or gone a wrong way, and were dealt with for it; but oh how wonderfully the Lord has gone before us, for He does go before His people. We have providence in the Scriptures - we have to see it in the case of Abraham who went forth not knowing whither he went but he obeyed the Lord's command. We see providence in the case of Jacob, Joseph, David, Job, and many others beside. This is a kingdom of providence over which the Lord reigns. He holds the reins of providence.

This kingdom is also a kingdom of grace, the Lord refers to this kingdom in the Gospel by Luke in a later chapter. Referring to this He says "The kingdom of God cometh not with observation....."

the kingdom of God is within you". This is the kingdom of grace. It is within you, that is to say, if we are the subjects of the grace of God, this kingdom is set up in our hearts and is a kingdom where the Lord reigns. Not only does He govern our providences, but He reigns in the heart, and this is the desire of the Lord's living people, "Reign o'er us as king, Accomplish Thy will". It is a kingdom that is within you, this is the power of grace in the heart by the Spirit quickening dead sinners into divine life, delivering them from the kingdom of this poor world and its awful consequences as terminating in everlasting destruction. It is a deliverance from all this in bringing them into the kingdom of the Lord Jesus Christ as referred to in Colossians where the Apostle says, "Giving thanks unto the Father, which hath made us meet to be partakers of the inheritance of the saints in light: Who hath delivered us from the power of darkness, and hath translated us into the kingdom of His dear Son". It is a mercy friends to be a subject of this kingdom.

Then there is another kingdom, the kingdom of heaven. We have never been there as yet but many are there, and everyone who is the subject of the kingdom of grace here, will one day be a subject of the kingdom of heaven there, that is the kingdom of glory. We read about it; we read that the dear Redeemer is there, and that the crown is placed upon His head and the spirits of those glorified saints there crown Him Lord of all. This is the kingdom of heaven, of everlasting glory, peace, happiness, joy for ever and ever.

So there are two kingdoms, the kingdom of this world and the kingdom of heaven; the kingdom of darkness and the kingdom of light; the kingdom of Satan and the kingdom of God. And here is the exhortation, "Rather seek ye the kingdom of God; and all these things shall be added unto you", and to encourage His disciples in this the Lord says, "Fear not, little flock; for it is your Father's good pleasure to give you the kingdom". It is His good pleasure to give it you if you are really seeking after it. If this is the first thing that weighs with you; if you are seeking the kingdom of God, your heavenly Father will delight to give it to you. It will be your

Father's good pleasure to give you the kingdom. So after all it is not something to be purchased with the wealth of material things, it is a divine gift, - the gift of all gifts - and this is all bound up so to speak in the gift of His beloved Son Who has procured it for all for whom He suffered and died upon the cross. He has procured it for us, and it will be our heavenly Father's good pleasure to give it to us if we are His people. This will be a kingdom of joy, of peace, of love, of happiness, soul and body will be glorified one day. The bodies of the redeemed of the Lord will be raised again and with their ransomed spirits, will be transformed to be for ever with the Lord in everlasting peace and joy. This is the kingdom of God and heaven. Alas, those who die in their sins, hardened, impenitent, careless; who disregard the Holy Word of God and its divine revelation; who turn away from it, who are under the kingdom of Satan; all such will one day sink into everlasting perdition, under the wrath of God for ever and ever. There are not many people who believe it, but whether people believe it or not, will make no difference to the truth of it. We read that the Lord will come again with power and great glory to gather all the redeemed of the Lord to be with Him for ever; so what I read this evening ended with an exhortation in verse 40 "Be ye therefore ready also; for the Son of man cometh at an hour when ye think not". Is not that a very solemn thought? I wonder how many people set out for their pleasures and never return again, but meet with sudden death by a crash on the road, or some other means, and are ushered into a never ending eternity. But if we are the subjects of this kingdom, it really makes no ultimate difference what may bring us to our end, for when the end comes if it is sudden death, it will be sudden glory. Well dear friends it is all profoundly solemn, it is unspeakably solemn, and the things of eternity are; for the things of time will pass away, and we shall be in a state that will continue for ever and ever, either of everlasting peace and joy, or everlasting pain and misery. May the Lord look upon us, may He bless each one of you here in this little congregation, that you may be heirs of heaven, and one day enter into that blessed estate that will never, never know an end. Amen.

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