

## ARTICLE IX.

THE KINGDOM OF GOD IN THE LIGHT OF JEWISH  
LITERATURE.<sup>1</sup>

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MODERN theology has focused attention on the teaching of Jesus. It has sought thereby to break through the later dogmas of the church and to draw its inspiration directly from him who is the source of it all. The phrase most frequently associated with Jesus' teaching in the Synoptic Gospels is the Kingdom of God. Such a writer as Professor Bruce<sup>2</sup> regards this as an "exhaustive category" under which all these teachings can be subsumed; and Ritschl, the great German theologian, has made the Kingdom central in his theology. Through such influences the Kingdom of God has come to stand in modern thought for the moral and social ideal of Jesus Christ. It is a heavenly ideal but it embodies itself in the church. It is a "divine commonwealth," gradually being realized on earth. The Kingdom of God has become the great shibboleth of Christians in their attack on modern sociological problems.

But a prominent New Testament scholar recently startled the theological world by affirming that this modern conception of the Kingdom of God was a very different thing from the Kingdom which Jesus proclaimed. Johannes Weiss<sup>3</sup> has maintained that the Kingdom of God in the New Testament must be interpreted in terms of Jewish eschatology, that it is transcendental and miraculous and has nothing to do with the

<sup>1</sup> Inaugural, Pacific Theological Seminary, April 6, 1908.

<sup>2</sup> Kingdom of God, pp. 40, 41.   <sup>3</sup> Die Predigt Jesu vom Reiche Gottes.

moral renovation of humanity. It is the future state of heavenly blessedness. The eschatological here replaces the moral and social conception. Shailer Mathews, of Chicago, after accepting the social view of the Kingdom, in his "Social Teaching of Jesus," rejected it for the eschatological, in his later work, the "Messianic Hope in the New Testament."<sup>1</sup>

Our common view of the Kingdom was bound to be attacked sooner or later, because it failed to recognize the historical background in the teaching of Jesus. Professor Bruce calmly ignores all discussion of what Jesus' hearers would understand when he spoke of the Kingdom. Jesus, however, treated the notion of the Kingdom as one current among the people. He nowhere expressly defined it and yet he certainly expected it to be understood. Any satisfactory exposition of the Kingdom of God, in the teaching of Jesus, must begin with a study of what that term meant to Jewish contemporaries. On the other hand, it does not follow that Jesus' conception must be identified with that which was common in his time. Christianity owes its origin to him, and Christianity is a far different religion from Judaism. Jesus never openly condemned the Jewish law; but with what sovereign freedom he treated it! The idea of the Kingdom, we may well believe, was, like everything else touched by him, deeply modified thereby. Still, the common Jewish interpretation remains the proper basis for discussion. Examined from this standpoint, what does the Kingdom of God mean in the teaching of Jesus?<sup>2</sup>

Much of the misunderstanding about the Kingdom of God has arisen from a failure to distinguish between the ancient,

<sup>1</sup> See especially pp. 80, 81, 88.

<sup>2</sup> In the answer which follows, the writer is especially indebted to his honored teacher, Professor Frank O. Porter.

oriental idea of Kingdom and our modern, western conception. Dalman<sup>1</sup> has well said, that an oriental Kingdom "is not a body politic in our sense, a people or a land under some form of constitution, but merely a sovereignty which embraces particular territory." The fundamental notion in the Hebrew מלכות or Greek βασιλεία is sovereignty, not realm, nor commonwealth. The Kingdom of God did not suggest to the Jew a picture of men under the rule of God; it suggested rather God himself, exercising his divine power and authority. Jewish discussion of the Kingdom focused on three points: 1. The nature of the present rule of God; 2. The future manifestation of that rule; 3. The kingship of Israel.

1. Considering these in their order, we ask, What is the nature of the present sovereignty of God? From the time of the prophets, the eternal, universal kingship of Jehovah was always the corner-stone of Jewish faith. All their literature<sup>2</sup> magnified God as the eternal king, and in the teaching of Jesus this is taken for granted. Those who listened to him did not need to be taught that God was Lord of heaven and earth.<sup>3</sup> But they, like men of all ages, had to reconcile their faith with the great problem of evil. The circumstances of their own history brought this problem home to the Jews with special force. How can Jehovah be King, when the greater part of the world's inhabitants do not recognize him; when the one people which does worship him is subjected and persecuted by the others! God rules, nevertheless, was the reply, but his rule is hidden for the present. Heathen sovereigns hold their power only by permission of the Almighty. "The Most High ruleth in the kingdom of men, and he giveth it to whomsoever he will."<sup>4</sup> Thus the book of Daniel explains Babylonian sover-

<sup>1</sup> *Words of Jesus*, p. 94.

<sup>2</sup> See Volz, *Jüd. Eschatologie*, p. 298 f.

<sup>3</sup> See Matt. v. 34, 35.

<sup>4</sup> Dan. iv. 17.

eignty as delegated by God. But even in Daniel there is recognition of angelic powers behind the heathen kings. These were the real forces which obscured the sovereignty of God. The Almighty has placed the world under the control of these heavenly beings, the same beings whom Paul calls world-elements, powers, and principalities. To them is due all the evil, both physical and moral, which now exists. Under the leadership of Belial or Satan they rule the world.<sup>1</sup> The Jews in Jesus' time regarded the present world very pessimistically. God had withdrawn from it; under demoniacal control it was hopelessly bad. They could only look forward to the time when the Lord would create a new world or take his people to himself in heaven. Such is the background of ideas manifest in contemporary Jewish writings and implied in the New Testament.<sup>2</sup> How, now, did Jesus conceive of the sovereignty of God in relation to the great problem of evil?

We have become accustomed to interpret Jesus' parables of the Kingdom as descriptions of the community of disciples which was to develop so wonderfully in the future, and this is justified in some measure by the interpretation which the First Gospel gives to them.<sup>3</sup> But it is hard to think that those to whom Jesus spoke could have thus understood him. The word "kingdom" directed their thoughts to the sovereign God, and not to his human subjects. Isaiah had compared the sovereignty of God to the waters of Shiloah that go softly,<sup>4</sup> so insignificant apparently that men might despise them. In like manner Jesus compared it to the tiny grain of mustard, to the seed growing secretly, to the leaven hidden in the lump. God's power never forces itself on the attention of

<sup>1</sup> In Rev. xiii. 2 the Roman Empire is the instrument of Satan.

<sup>2</sup> Bousset, *Religion des Judentums*, p. 393.

<sup>3</sup> Matt. xiii. 36-43.

<sup>4</sup> Isa. viii. 6.

men: it is evident only to the eyes of faith. It is secret and unseen, but no less real and powerful. Part of the supreme purpose of Jesus was the restoration of confidence in the invisible sovereignty of God. The Lord has not withdrawn from the world. The thorns and the rocky ground waste the seed, storms come and destroy the house built on the sand; still, nature is to be relied upon. If man does his part, nature, ruled by the secret power of God, will respond. The birds of the heaven and the lilies of the field manifest the loving care of God. Disease is a fact of life; but to the man of faith the Almighty giveth power even over this dread foe. Sin is an awful reality; but God is at work saving men from its dominion, forgiving them in the full active sense of the term. Jesus compares his own divine mission to that of a physician. He is sent to the sick, not to those who are whole.

Jesus' contemporaries, as we have seen, attributed all this evil to demoniacal powers. Evil manifests the Kingdom of Satan, a rule which opposes the sovereignty of God. His Pharisaic adversaries even maintained that it was through this power of evil that Jesus himself was able to do his mighty works. In his reply he did not deny the existence of the Kingdom of Satan, but he insisted that it was a divided, a falling sovereignty.<sup>1</sup> He assured his disciples that they need have no fear of Satan and his demons.<sup>2</sup> God rules supreme; of him only, need they be afraid.<sup>3</sup> Man's philosophy of evil and its origin changes with the ages, but the awful fact always remains the same. We to-day substitute mechanical laws and biological forces for the personal, demoniacal powers of the ancients; but does the substitution seriously affect man's religious need? However we interpret it, evil is a terrible, but —

<sup>1</sup> Luke xi. 14 ff., and parallels.

<sup>2</sup> Luke x. 17-20.

<sup>3</sup> Luke xii. 5 ff.=Matt. x. 27 ff.

Jesus teaches us to believe — a losing power. God's power is greater and is bound to prevail. The early Christians did not learn from their Master a new philosophy of evil, but they were inspired with a new faith and confidence in the present sovereignty of God, the present *βασιλεία τοῦ θεοῦ*.

2. Returning again to our Jewish background, we find that, while Jewish literature always regarded the sovereignty of God as eternal, present as well as future, they were most concerned in its future manifestation. Only the seer, able to pierce the heavens, can behold God's rule now; but the time is coming when heathen sovereigns will be brought low, and the dominion of Satan overthrown, when the Kingdom of God will appear throughout all his creation.<sup>1</sup> The more ignorant conceived of this future divine rule, after the manner of the rule of Rome. Only, in this divine rule, present conditions were to be reversed, the heathen were to be judged, and Israel exalted. Such were the anticipations of the multitudes who accompanied Jesus on his triumphal entry into Jerusalem, and shouted, "Blessed is the kingdom that cometh, the kingdom of our father David!"<sup>2</sup> Others transferred the scene to the heavenly, the supersensuous sphere, as it has been appropriately called; but the underlying thought remained the same. Interest was focused on this future manifestation of God's sovereignty. When would it be? What were to be the signs of its coming? These were the burning questions.

John the Baptist modified in certain respects the prevalent notions. He proclaimed in the wilderness that the Kingdom of God was near. He meant by this that God was coming in judgment, with his irresistible omnipotence, to strike one terrible blow for righteousness.<sup>3</sup> But, like the prophets of old, he

<sup>1</sup> Cf. *Ass. of Moses* x. 1.

<sup>2</sup> *Mark* xl. 10.

<sup>3</sup> *Matt.* iii. 7 ff.=*Luke* iii. 7 ff.

insisted that it was to be a judgment without respect to persons — not upon the heathen merely, but upon Israel herself. Here is the point in which he corrected the more popular view, and gave a deep ethical significance to these apocalyptic pictures of the future.

We are therefore not surprised that Jesus took up this message of John, and likewise proclaimed that the Kingdom of God was near. To him also this meant a judgment to come upon heathen and Israelite alike. When his attention was called to the Galileans who were slain while sacrificing, he said,<sup>1</sup> "Think ye that these Galileans were sinners above all the Galileans, because they suffered these things? I tell you, Nay: but, except ye repent, ye shall all in like manner perish." John's message of repentance and judgment is not lost in the gospel of Jesus.

Even those who make the eschatological motive most dominant in his teaching grant that Jesus was little concerned in describing how that judgment was to take place and in picturing the future lot of those acquitted and those condemned. Of the future he speaks only to magnify the importance of right conduct in the present. Taking the Gospels just as they are, we find that even the great eschatological discourse of Mark xiii.,<sup>2</sup> with its detailed apocalyptic pictures of the future, only leads up to the parables on watchfulness. The supreme emphasis is laid not upon the future itself but the present preparation for what is to come. Moreover, literary criticism throws serious doubts on these apocalyptic pictures. There are strong grounds, too technical to be presented, for believing that tradition has here incorporated into the teaching of Jesus a short Jewish apocalypse. In this section the very signs are

<sup>1</sup> Luke xiii. 1 ff.

<sup>2</sup> The parallel accounts in Matthew and Luke are secondary.

promised which are elsewhere repudiated by Jesus. "In those days . . . the sun shall be darkened and the moon shall not give her light, and the stars shall be falling from heaven, and the powers that are in the heavens shall be shaken."<sup>1</sup> Again and again the demand was made of him that he show these long-expected signs of the Kingdom's coming, if he were indeed the Messiah. Mark reports one occasion when he baldly refused the request,<sup>2</sup> Matthew and Luke relate what he said at probably a different time, "An evil and adulterous generation seeketh a sign, and no sign shall be given to it, but the sign of Jonah."<sup>3</sup> Jonah preaching to the Ninevites had been to that people a token which was heeded. Jesus' preaching to this generation ought to be a sufficient token for it. Even more emphatic is the saying, "The Kingdom of God cometh not with observation."<sup>4</sup> The whole discourse which follows in Luke condemns all such seeking for physical signs.<sup>5</sup> Jesus taught that each man should rather prepare for his Lord's coming, by doing God's will: "Blessed is that servant whom his Lord when he cometh shall find so doing."<sup>6</sup> This is the dominant note in Jesus' teaching, and it shows how far apart he stood from the Jewish apocalyptic writer. On the other hand, we are not to read into his sayings our own modern notions of the hereafter, which are so deeply influenced by theories of evolution. All of Jesus' disciples looked forward to an apocalyptic day of judgment, and they expected that day

<sup>1</sup> Mark xiii. 24.<sup>2</sup> Mark viii. 11-13.<sup>3</sup> Matt. xii. 39-42. Verse 40 is an insertion; see Allen, Commentary on Matthew.<sup>4</sup> Luke xvii. 20.<sup>5</sup> This discourse has a parallel in Matt. xxiv., and must have stood in the common discourse source of Matthew and Luke. Wellhausen's commentaries *in loco* show how it contradicts Mark xiii. Here, rather than in Mark, is to be found the eschatological attitude of Jesus.<sup>6</sup> Luke xii. 43=Matt. xxiv. 46.



to come within their lifetime. It is hard to doubt that Jesus shared this mistaken belief: "There are some here of them that stand by, who shall in no wise taste of death, till they see the Kingdom of God come with power."<sup>1</sup> But we also read, "Of that day or hour knoweth no man, not even the angels in heaven, nor the Son, but the Father."<sup>2</sup> Jesus described the future in the terms of Jewish apocalyptic speculation, and we probably ought also to say that he thought in those terms; but his teaching was not determined by the eschatology of his time, any more that it was by the demonology. It focused attention on what was of eternal significance, and so transcended such limitations.

Moreover, there is another side to Jesus' teaching in regard to the coming manifestation of God's sovereignty, that needs to be considered. He took up the message of John the Baptist, the Kingdom of God is at hand, and, when he said this, he had in mind, as John did, the coming of God in judgment; but he also meant something more which John had never thought of. The differences between John and Jesus deserve attention, as well as the resemblances. While John was in prison he heard of the works of Jesus.<sup>3</sup> Instead, however, of being impressed by them, he was disappointed. Surely such were not the works of the Messiah, God's instrument of judgment. They did not reveal the sovereignty of God as that sovereignty was portrayed by the older prophets, such as Amos and Hosea. Jesus replied to the messengers of John by describing his works in language borrowed from the great unknown prophet of the exile. It was as if he said, John, you have not read enough from the prophets; read further and you will see that

<sup>1</sup> Mark ix. 1.

<sup>2</sup> Mark xiii. 32. It is only the exact date, however, that is here said to be unknown.

<sup>3</sup> Matt. xi. 2-19.

these works of mercy and love which I do are indeed manifestations of God's sovereignty, they belong to the task of his Messiah. And with a tender sympathy which his followers have not always shown, he added, "And blessed is he who shall find no occasion of stumbling in me."

When Jesus said that the Kingdom of God was at hand, he taught that the Lord was near not only in judgment, but in a spiritual presence to help mankind.<sup>1</sup> The Gospels fully justify us in affirming that Jesus found in his own works of love and mercy a manifestation of divine kingship: "If I by the finger of God cast out demons, then is the kingdom of God come upon you."<sup>2</sup> In another passage, to which reference has already been made, he says, "The kingdom of God cometh not with observation, neither shall they say, Lo, here! or there! for lo, the kingdom of God is in your midst, or [as it may be translated] within you." The Kingdom was already in their midst manifest in the works of Jesus, or, adopting the variant translation, it was something to be expected in their hearts, a spiritual presence of God. The Kingdom, i.e. the manifest sovereignty of the Lord, is no faint hope to be revealed in the near or the distant future. Jesus found God's sovereign power present within himself. By virtue of it, he brought healing to the sick, assurance of divine forgiveness to the penitent, and glad tidings of God's love to all who would listen.<sup>3</sup>

However, this manifestation of God in Jesus was rejected by the multitudes, and denied by the Jewish leaders. They refused to see in it even a sign of the future manifestation. It is for this reason that the coming of God in judgment is so

<sup>1</sup> Cf. Ps. cxix. 151.

<sup>2</sup> Luke xi. 20—Matt. xii. 28.

<sup>3</sup> Wernle, *Die Reichsgottes Hoffnung*, p. 44, limits the revelation of divine power to the miraculous works; but the preaching of the glad tidings is the climax of Matt. xi. 5 and is given the supreme place in the thought of Jesus (cf. Mark i. 32-39).

often spoken of by Jesus as a self-vindication. The day when God should manifest himself in judgment was likewise to be a day when the Son of Man would be seen in glory and majesty. Jesus declared to the high priest, "Ye shall see the Son of Man sitting at the right hand of power and coming with the clouds of heaven."<sup>1</sup> This is an apocalyptic picture, the language is borrowed from Daniel.<sup>2</sup> It was no doubt taken quite literally in the age of the New Testament. But its eternal significance is in the positive, religious conviction which it expresses, the conviction that God would vindicate before men the mission of Jesus Christ. That vindication has not yet come as Jesus described it; but who would question it now?

3. There remains a third element in the Jewish discussions of the Kingdom — the kingship of Israel. The Jewish world was ruled by Persia, then by Greece, and in the time of Jesus by Rome. These heathen rulers the Jew looked upon as representatives of the demoniacal powers to whom God for the present has turned over the world dominion. But the time was coming when the Almighty would overthrow the rule of Satan. Who then would be God's representatives? There could be no doubt, then Jehovah's people, Israel, would rule in the place of the heathen powers of the present. Daniel<sup>3</sup> saw in a vision four beasts who were followed by one like a son of man. The angel interpreted the vision and said that these great beasts were four kings who should arise out of the earth, and the one like a son of man was the people of Israel, the saints of the Most High, who should receive the Kingdom and possess it even forever and ever. The Israelite looked forward to a time when the dominion of the world would be given to him and his people. This was their heritage. The kingship of God meant at the same time the kingship of Israel.

<sup>1</sup> Mark xiv. 62.<sup>2</sup> Dan. vii. 13.<sup>3</sup> Dan. vii.

Turning now to the Gospels, we read such sayings as these: "Ye blessed of my Father, ye shall inherit the kingdom of God prepared for you from the foundations of the earth;"<sup>1</sup> "And I appoint unto you a kingdom, even as my Father appointed unto me, that ye may eat and drink in my kingdom;"<sup>2</sup> "Fear not, little children, it is your Father's good pleasure to give you the kingdom."<sup>3</sup> The close relation of such passages to the current Jewish conceptions is evident. Certainly the evangelists regarded the Kingdom as something more than an ideal society ruled by God. It is a word of power, it stands for the divine sovereignty, in which the gracious Lord permits men to share. Not only the evangelists but Jesus himself must have so regarded it.

Scholars who, like Dalman, acknowledge that "kingdom" in Jewish literature always means sovereignty, insist, however, that in the Gospels it must have a different significance.<sup>4</sup> Attention is called to the use of the word "kingdom" with the preposition "in"; for example, "enter into the kingdom." The preposition "in," we are told, gives a locative force. But Dalman himself says that "the rendering, *to attain to*, corresponds more closely to the original (Aramaic) than, *to enter into*."<sup>5</sup> The Kingdom is, in truth, a divine power to which we may attain, rather than a community or a coming age into which we may enter. If, because of the language of the Greek, some local sense is demanded in these passages, let us think of the Kingdom here as the kingly state, the position of divine power. In the Gospels, "eternal life," "glory of the Lord," "joy of the Lord" are sometimes used as synonyms

<sup>1</sup> Matt. xxv. 34.<sup>2</sup> Luke xli. 29, 30.<sup>3</sup> Luke xli. 32.<sup>4</sup> In *Words of Jesus*, p. 135, he says that in the Gospels, contrary to the usage of all contemporary literature, the Kingdom means the future age.<sup>5</sup> *Words of Jesus*, p. 117.

for "kingdom." In Jewish thought these terms were much more closely associated with the coming age than "kingdom," but they also are primarily descriptive of the eternal God whose attributes man is to share. They belong to the future only as God's manifestation of himself is future. But Jesus differed from his contemporaries in regarding this manifestation as present as well as future. This we have tried at least to show. We still maintain, therefore, that the Kingdom of God is the sovereignty of God, and that man's entering into the Kingdom is sharing in this divine kingship. Such an heritage was the hope of the Jews. Jesus confirmed this hope. Nevertheless, this heritage is a very different thing in Christian thought from what it was to the Jews. Our previous discussion has led us to expect this.

The very idea of sovereignty and rule was entirely transformed by Jesus. We have seen how he corrected John the Baptist, and pointed out that God's sovereignty was not only a judicial but above all a loving power. His reply to the request of the two sons of Zebedee has become a commonplace to us, but it is one of the most revolutionary expressions in all his sayings: "Ye know that they who are accounted to rule over the Gentiles lord it over them, and their great ones exercise authority over them. But it is not so among you, but whosoever would be great among you shall be your minister."<sup>1</sup> No more pointed condemnation of Jewish hopes could have been spoken. Human rulership, like the divine, should express itself in loving service. The parables of the tares, the dragnet, the forgiving King, the laborers in the vineyard, and the marriage feast, all present the divine kingship as patient, forgiving, fatherly, generously bountiful. "God maketh his sun to rise on the evil and the good, and sendeth rain on the just and

<sup>1</sup> *Mark x. 42, 43.*

the unjust." Such is the sovereignty of God, such it always has been and always will be. The Jew was right; God does grant to men the privilege of sharing his kingship, but the Jew had not interpreted that kingship in accord with the loving Fatherhood of God. It means the conquest of all evil, and it also means the triumph of love. When kingship is thus understood, we need not be perplexed at finding in the Gospels sayings which imply degrees of kingly power, nor is there any room for the question raised by Johannes Weiss,<sup>1</sup> who asks over whom this kingly power is to be wielded? The sovereignty of God knows no exercise of authority over subject peoples. It is the very purpose of God's kingship, paradoxical as it sounds, to do away with such distinctions by exalting all to his own divine plane.

We are also in a position now to understand better why the idea of divine kingship is not so bound up with the future age in the thought of Jesus as it is in contemporary Jewish speculation. As long as the rulership of believers was conceived more or less after the analogy of the heathen world-powers, there was no sense in which it could be recognized as a present reality on earth. It could only exist in the present as something hidden with God in heaven. But if, with Jesus, we interpret this divine rulership in which the believer is to share as a conquest of evil and a triumph of love, then it has its place in the present, here on earth — an apparently insignificant place, to be sure, where it can be seen only by the eye of faith — but a place nevertheless. Its goal is in the future, there only can we attain its full realization; but it is a power already here, we may begin to enjoy it now. Again, the key to an understanding may be found in Jesus' consciousness of the divine presence in his own life. The power

<sup>1</sup>Die Predigt Jesu vom Reiche Gottes, p. 122.

which he felt within himself was to be shared by his disciples also. They likewise were to have authority to proclaim the glad tidings of the Kingdom,<sup>1</sup> to declare the forgiveness of sins,<sup>2</sup> and to do the mighty works which Jesus himself did.<sup>3</sup> If he regarded these activities as manifestations of the Kingdom in his own life, he must have so regarded them in the lives of his disciples. The future sovereignty in which they were to share is not to be separated from the divine power which was granted in the present. The former only completes and vindicates the latter.

Probably the most evident difference between the teaching of Jesus and that of his contemporaries regarding the Kingdom is the rejection on the part of Jesus of all national limitations. Not even the most transcendental interpretations of it in Jewish literature are entirely free from these national limitations. The nobler souls recognized that mere physical birth as a child of Abraham was not sufficient to insure a share in the divine kingship to which all looked forward. They taught that the kingship belonged to the righteous Israelite, the punctilious observer of the law, but still to the Israelite; even they could think of heathen nations only as subjects of Israel. Jesus discarded all these nationalistic ideas of the Kingdom of God. He never referred to these Jewish notions except to warn his hearers of their fallacy: "Many shall come from the east and the west, and shall sit down with Abraham, and Isaac, and Jacob, in the kingdom of heaven, but the sons of the kingdom shall be cast forth into outer darkness."<sup>4</sup> Not the Israelite who boasts of being the son of the Kingdom, its natural heir, but the heathen, shall sit on the thrones of the patriarchs and share the Messianic feast.

<sup>1</sup> Matt. x. 7=Luke x. 9.

<sup>2</sup> Matt. xviii. 18 ff; cf. John xx. 23.

<sup>3</sup> Matt. x. 8; Luke x. 9, 17 ff.

<sup>4</sup> Matt. viii. 11=Luke xiii. 29.

Who then is it, according to the teaching of Jesus, that shall share the divine kingship? To answer this fully would mean the setting forth of the larger part of the sayings of Jesus. But two lines of thought seem fundamental in his teaching. Complete childlike trust in the fatherly rulership of God is the first condition: "Whosoever shall not receive the kingdom of God as a little child shall in no wise enter therein."<sup>1</sup> But this passive attitude toward the divine rule is not sufficient; an active imitation of that rule is also demanded. In the parable of the talents we are taught that the sovereignty of God leaves room for the freedom of man. Power is given to him; and, if he would inherit the greater power and enter into the joy of his Lord, he must use the freedom and power he already has, in accordance with the will of God. The parable of the forgiving King teaches that as God forgives so man must forgive. Imitate God! is the command underlying the Sermon on the Mount, whether we read it in its Matthean or its Lucan form. "Thy kingdom come" is not only to be our prayer, but our life purpose. In a word, then, who shall share the divine kingship? Those who accept the sovereignty of God in the confident trust of a little child, and who likewise endeavor to imitate God, entering into the accomplishment of the divine purposes. Man's task is the acceptance and imitation of God's rule; his reward is the larger participation in that rule; the Kingdom is both *Aufgabe* and *Gabe*, as the Germans say—both task and reward.

Retracing now our steps in this somewhat involved argument, we have interpreted God's Kingdom as meaning God's sovereignty. We have seen that Jesus regarded this sovereignty as eternally present, not only in heaven but in the world. God is overcoming evil in the world now; and the day

<sup>1</sup> Mark x. 15.



is coming when that conquest will be complete, all evil will be destroyed, and the divine kingship will be manifest to every one. Jesus felt that he himself was an agent of God in this conquest of evil through love; in his work God's sovereignty was revealed. The kingship of the Father was the heritage of the Son, yea more, (and it is this which we have found to be the great burden of Jesus' teaching regarding the Kingdom) all who enter into this relation of sonship to the Father, they also are heirs of divine kingship. By accepting and imitating God's rule even as Jesus did, we share his heritage; and as this kingly power of God was manifest even in the human life of Jesus so we may know something of it in our lives now. Whoever doubts this divine sovereignty which reveals itself in love and righteousness shall see the day when it will be vindicated, such is the confident statement of Jesus.

Those who have grown weary of the long discussion are probably asking themselves, What does it all amount to? First, it means that the Kingdom of God is not primarily eschatological; it is not to be identified with the future age, nor even with future blessedness conceived as something apart from the present. Again, it means that the Kingdom of God is not the Church, nor is it the ideal Christian society which is slowly developing here on earth; it is the divine power which is surely bringing such a society to pass. It implies, indeed, a society in which love rules, and evil is done away; but it directs attention not to the society, but to the divine power which is accomplishing this and in which it is humanity's privilege to share. It means, furthermore, that the Kingdom of God is not so much sociological as religious. Problems of the state, industry, and society are the live questions of to-day. What is the message of Jesus to us, facing such problems? Inspire men, individual men and women, with a steadfast trust in the

loving, righteous rule of God, inspire them with a devout purpose to imitate that rule even as Jesus did, and they shall be filled with the sovereign power of God to bring about on earth the conquest of evil and the triumph of love. The Kingdom of God is a personal kingship, but not of a competitive, exclusive sort; it is the kingship of sacrificing love. It sounds so bold one hardly dares to mention it—but the teaching of Jesus holds before us a future, when God will have exalted men to a place at his side, not at his feet, and the human idea of a kingdom with its distinction between King and subject will be no more. “Be ye therefore perfect, as your Father in heaven is perfect.”