

ZION AND THE KINGDOM

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SCRIPTURE: Section 65, Doctrine and Covenants

Hearken, and lo, a voice as of one sent down from on high, who is mighty and powerful whose going forth is unto the ends of the earth; yea, whose voice is unto man, Prepare ye the way of the Lord, and make his paths straight. The keys of the kingdom of God are committed unto man on the earth, and from thence shall the gospel roll forth unto the ends of the earth, as the stone which is cut out of the mountain without hands shall roll forth, until it has filled the whole earth; yea, a voice crying, Prepare ye the way of the Lord; prepare ye the supper of the Lamb; make ready for the bridegroom; pray unto the Lord; call upon his holy name; make known his wonderful works among the people; call upon the Lord that his kingdom may go forth upon the earth; that the inhabitants thereof may receive it, and be prepared for the days to come, in the which the Son of Man shall come down in heaven, clothed in the brightness of the glory, to meet the kingdom of God which is set up on earth; wherefore may the kingdom of God go forth, that the kingdom of heaven may come, that thou, O God, may be glorified in heaven, so on earth; that thy enemies may be subdued; for thine is the honor, power, and glory, for ever and ever. Amen.

And the Lord called his people Zion, because they were of one heart and one mind, and dwelt in righteousness, and there was no poor among them.

In common with many other Christian people, Latter Day Saints believe in the imminent, personal, visible coming of Jesus Christ to reign over his kingdom on earth. When Jesus returns to reign, over what kingdom will he reign? On the face of it, it seems impossible that he should take over any of the existing thrones or kingdoms, complete with their assortments of national and international jealousies, intrigues, and prejudices. Part of his kingdom, of course, he will bring with him — that is, the resurrection saints of all ages. But will that be all of his kingdom? Will there be no visible kingdom of God on earth until Christ comes?

Jesus taught us to pray, "Thy kingdom come, they will be done on earth as it is in heaven." The kingdom of God will come on earth when God's will is done on earth as it is done in heaven. Obviously Jesus cannot and will not come to earth to reign over a wicked, unrighteous people who are in open rebellion against him. If he comes at all to such, it will be only in judgment and destruction after they have had every opportunity to know and accept him as King, but have persistently and rebelliously refused. Jesus wants willing subjects — not subjects forced into his service, or compelled to acknowledge him as Lord and King.

Before Jesus can come again to earth, then, there must be in existence at least a nucleus of people who accept him as ruler, Lord, and King. There must be a waiting expectant group of people who have bowed already to his authority — who in humility and self-forgetfulness have given themselves to him. There must be a group of people who have obeyed the ordinances of his church administered under his authority, and who through that obedience have been re-born, regenerated — who have become new creatures. There must be a group of people who have completely broken with their old allegiances to the world to the world, the flesh, and the devil, and who have declared and demonstrated in daily living their allegiance to Christ and to his saving principles of life.

At this point I can almost hear someone saying, "Isn't it enough to have the kingdom in my heart? Isn't it enough that I have given my heart to Jesus?" No, that is not enough. It is utterly impossible to separate true religion or true conversion from daily actions. One of the greatest weaknesses of Christianity today is its very

human and persistent attempt to keep religion a thing of the heart without any practical demonstration in the mundane affairs of getting a living, paying one's debts, getting along with the neighbors, keeping peace between employer and employee, assuring honesty in government, or keeping the peace between nations.

Can a true disciple of Christ, and a true subject of his kingdom have love in his heart, and ignore the needs of others? Can he love God and Christ, and neglect to love his neighbor and minister to his needs? John, the beloved disciple says: "Hereby perceive we the love of Christ, because he laid down his life for us; (that is, his love found active, dynamic, physical expression) and we ought to lay down our lives for the brethren. But those hath this world's good, and seeth his brother have need, and shutteth up his bowels of compassion from him, how dwelleth the love of God in him? My little children, let us not love in word, neither in tongue only, but in deed and in truth." No, the kingdom will not be composed of those who keep love in their heart but never do anything practical about it. Rather it will be composed of those who implement love, by giving expression to it in tangible physical ministry to those who need that love.

The kingdom of God cannot be composed of those who profess to have righteousness in their hearts, but who neglect right relationships with others in the practical, everyday affairs of social, political, industrial, and economic life. "Righteousness" is not some vague, impractical quality that is found exclusively in the human heart. In the original Greek of the New Testament "righteousness" very frequently has the meaning of "justice." Righteousness is simply justice -- God's justice -- in our dealings with each other. In the kingdom of God we shall not have a group of people sitting complacently "saved" in the midst of poverty, sickness, sorrow, ignorance, injustice, graft, crime, vice, greed, hunger, and war; but rather a group of people who at least among themselves have solved most or all of those problems to the point where they can live in peace and unity one with the other. The righteousness of the kingdom of God is right relationships between man and man, as well as between man and God, in affairs of politics, business, industry, economics, banking, social relations, and even the relations between nations.

Once upon a time there was a people who achieved this state. They were the people of Enoch, who are so briefly mentioned in the fifth chapter of Genesis and in the 11th chapter of Hebrews. In modern revelation given through the prophet Joseph Smith we are given a few additional facts about Enoch and his city. We are told that "the Lord called his people Zion, because they were of one heart and one mind, and dwelt in righteousness, and there was no poor among them." They loved each other to the point where all differences were adjusted or resolved. They were of "one heart and one mind." They had solved the problems of social relationships. "There were no poor among them." They had solved the problems of economic relationships. They were an outpost of the kingdom of God on earth, and according to Paul's meager account, were translated into the kingdom of heaven without tasting death.

Latter Day Saints are trying to prepare another Zion like the Zion of Enoch, composed of a people gathered out and grouped together, regenerated through the ordinances of the gospel of Christ, prepared for service to each other and to the world, sworn to allegiance to Christ as King, living together in righteousness, justice, equality, love and peace. We believe that when such a people is prepared, Christ can come to them and reign over them; that he can use that people as an object lesson to all the peoples of earth; that he can use its citizens as ambassadors to other kingdoms of earth, calling them to repentance and citizenship in the kingdom of God on earth.

We live in hope and expectation of the day when the righteousness of such a people will make possible the coming of our Lord. We are striving to perfect ourselves, individually and collectively, that we may be worthy to dwell in Zion and meet the Zion from above -- Enoch's city -- when Christ comes. We pray that the kingdom of God may go forth on the earth, and that the kingdom of heaven may come, that Jesus Christ may rule as king and Lord over all his saints.