

## SABBATH THOUGHT 2024-09-21—OF SUCH IS THE KINGDOM

May God bless you on His Sabbath day!

One of the most widely recognized scriptures in the Bible is puzzling. It describes the time when children were brought to Jesus, likely by their parents, for Him to bless:

MARK 10:13-16 Then they brought little children to Him [*Jesus Christ*], that He might touch them; but **the disciples rebuked those who brought them**. 14 But when Jesus saw *it*, He was greatly displeased and said to them, “Let the little children come to Me, and do not forbid them; for of such is the kingdom of God. 15 “Assuredly, I say to you, whoever does not receive the kingdom of God as a little child will by no means enter it.” 16 And He took them up in His arms, laid *His* hands on them, and blessed them.

What is bothersome is that some or all of the twelve disciples tried to keep the children from coming to Jesus. Why in the world would they do that? It is not as if Jesus had ever given them any indication that He had ever refused to see anyone before. In fact, He dedicated His life and ministry to the people by feeding, teaching, and healing them. He did it almost to exhaustion because there were times He needed to be alone with His Father<sup>1</sup> to be rejuvenated.

What were the disciples thinking that they would deny the parents access to Jesus? Did they consider children to be a waste of Jesus' time because of their age? Were they so ingrained with the ways of the priests and scribes who thought they were more important than the common people that they tried to shut them out of the Kingdom<sup>2</sup>? Regardless, Jesus was “greatly displeased” with the disciples. Their true motives at the time may never be known but their behavior is still baffling.

The parents wanted Jesus to “touch” their children. The word in the Greek implies a very intimate and caring love. It means to attach oneself to or take hold of in the sense of a deep relationship similar to that with a spouse. Jesus was not a stranger to the parents. They obviously followed Him, listened to Him, and believed He is the Messiah. They wanted their children to be blessed by the Son of God. Perhaps they were moved by the words of Jesus when He said:

MATTHEW 18:3-5 and said, “Assuredly, I [*Jesus Christ*] say to you, unless you are converted and become as little children, you will by no means enter the kingdom of heaven. 4 “Therefore whoever humbles himself as this little child is the greatest in the kingdom of heaven. 5 “**Whoever receives one little child like this in My name receives Me.**”

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<sup>1</sup> Matt. 14:23; Luke 9:18.

<sup>2</sup> Matt. 23:13.

The main point of this story is that Jesus said “of such [*little children*] **is** the kingdom of God.” The Kingdom of God will consist of innocent, meek, loving, and obedient children. This is exactly what is described in the Beatitudes: the eternal Kingdom of God will be filled with children who are humble, meek, righteous, merciful, pure in heart, and peacemakers:

MATTHEW 5: 3-9 “Blessed *are* the **poor [humble] in spirit, For theirs is the kingdom of heaven.** 4 Blessed *are* those who mourn, for they shall be comforted. 5 Blessed *are* the **meek, for they shall inherit the earth.** 6 Blessed *are* those who **hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they shall be filled.** 7 Blessed *are* the **merciful, for they shall obtain mercy.** 8 Blessed *are* the **pure in heart, for they shall see God.** 9 Blessed *are* the **peacemakers, for they shall be called sons of God.**

The Kingdom of God is captured in a vision of the New Heavens and New Earth where the city of New Jerusalem descends out of heaven “having the **glory of God!**”<sup>3</sup> If flesh and blood cannot look upon the glory of the face of God without perishing<sup>4</sup>, that is a glory that cannot be imagined. The city and the streets are made entirely of transparent gold. There is a great high wall around it made of jasper with twelve gates, each made of a single pearl, and an angel beside each one. The wall sits on twelve foundations made of twelve precious stones<sup>5</sup>.

Is this your vision of the Kingdom of God? I hope so. You should dwell upon this amazing eternity where all will “rejoice with joy inexpressible and full of glory” (1 Pet. 1:8). It will be a time when “**the increase of His [empire] and peace there will be no end,** upon the throne of David, and over His kingdom, to order it and **establish it with judgment and with justice** from that time forward, even **forever.**” (Isa. 9: 7).

But how will this be possible? That might sound like an odd question, but consider how it can be possible for rejoicing, joy unspeakable, peace, and justice to *increase* for all eternity? Simplistically, one could say it will just happen because New Jerusalem “is the city of the **Great King**”<sup>6</sup>. God the Father possesses all power, might, majesty, glory, and honor so He will just cause it to happen. That is not very satisfying because the answer is foundational to what the Kingdom IS. *What* the Kingdom will be in all its glory is described in Revelation 21. But *how* this eternally increases is dependent upon the character of those who *reside* in it.

Think of it this way. Few people buy a house they personally designed and built. A husband usually evaluates the construction and practical aspects of a house; however, it is the wife who personalizes it. The furniture, colors, artwork, family photos, etc. reflects the uniqueness, taste, and character of the woman. These things make a house into a home, more than the design and construction. Visitors see the personality of the woman mirrored in those things.

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<sup>3</sup> Rev. 21:10.

<sup>4</sup> Exod. 33:20.

<sup>5</sup> Rev. 21:11-21.

<sup>6</sup> Matthew 5:35.

The same is true in the Kingdom. In all its glory, the city of New Jerusalem will be so much more than anyone can dream or imagine. But, just like a house, the city of New Jerusalem will reflect the character of those who inhabit it—in this case it is the Wife of the Son of God! New Jerusalem is a city “**prepared as a Bride** adorned for her Husband” (Rev. 21:2)! How is the Bride of Christ prepared? In every way that will be pleasing to her Husband! Everything about her will be PERFECTION—her heart, beauty, humility, conduct, service, smile, joy, and conversation. She will be the perfect Bride whose Husband presents her to His Father in a glorious ceremony. Her home will reflect that perfection as well. The city of New Jerusalem is like a home prepared and adorned by the Bride for her Husband and it mirrors her perfection.

Someone entering into New Jerusalem through one of the twelve gates will know that the Wife of Jesus Christ lives there because it will reflect her humility, meekness, righteousness, mercy, pure heart, and peace.

REVELATION 21:24-25 And **the nations of those who are saved** shall walk in its [New Jerusalem] light, and **the kings of the earth** bring their glory and honor into it [New Jerusalem]. 25 Its gates shall not be shut at all by day (there shall be no night there).

The New Jerusalem is the city of the Great King, His Son, and the Son's Bride. Those who would live in the city of New Jerusalem must PREPARE *before* they take up residence there and it all comes down to BECOMING agape love as God is and DOING good works.

I speak about those two topics often because they define the perfect character of God the Father and Jesus Christ!! Anyone who is *not* becoming agape love and dedicating their lives to serving others will NOT be a part of it. That is the parable of the sheep and goats:

#### THE SHEEP:

MATTHEW 25:34-36 “Then the King [*Jesus Christ*] will say to those [*the sheep*] on His right hand, ‘Come, you blessed of My Father, **inherit the kingdom** prepared for you from the foundation of the world: **35 ‘for I was hungry and you gave Me food; I was thirsty and you gave Me drink; I was a stranger and you took Me in; 36 ‘I was naked and you clothed Me; I was sick and you visited Me; I was in prison and you came to Me.’**”

#### THE GOATS:

MATTHEW 25:41-43 “Then He [*Jesus Christ*] will also say to those [*the goats*] on the left hand, ‘**Depart from Me, you cursed,** into the everlasting fire prepared for the devil and his angels: **42 ‘for I was hungry and you gave Me no food; I was thirsty and you gave Me no drink; 43 ‘I was a stranger and you did not take Me in, naked and you did not clothe Me, sick and in prison and you did not visit Me.’**”

Those who fail to grow in agape love and do good works in this life are also likened to the five foolish virgins who are found lacking (Matt. 25: 1-12). They will be shut out of the wedding and Jesus Christ will say, "I do not know you". Those who fail to grow their "talents" will end up weeping and gnashing their teeth (Matt. 25: 14-30) when they are denied entry "into the joy of [the] Lord" and "cast ... into outer darkness."

All these parables portray the only two outcomes for everyone called and chosen by God. The children of God either become agape love and do good works ... or not. Those who want to live in the city of New Jerusalem are zealously doing these things NOW, in this life. The city of New Jerusalem will be overwhelmingly inviting, secure, beautiful, comfortable, peaceful, generous, calm, and loving—a place where everyone desires to be and where all are welcome. Entering into that home will be an unimaginable experience of perfect agape love where all are served.

The Passover, Days of Unleavened Bread, and Pentecost are Covenant Days. Passover is the blood of the New Covenant, Days of Unleavened Bread are liberty from sin into the righteousness of God, and Pentecost is the sealing of the Holy Spirit. These days are pieces of our covenant with God.

The Feast of Ingathering (Trumpets, Atonement, and Tabernacles) are Kingdom Days. They portray the destruction of the wicked, liberation of the world from sin, and the offering of eternal life to mankind. When all is finished, God will "make all things new"<sup>7</sup>—a New Heavens and a New Earth—and the city of New Jerusalem in all its glory will descend to the New Earth. This is the realization of the eternal Kingdom of God and Jesus Christ.

The Feast of Ingathering portrays the final destruction of evil and a universal transformation into righteousness and agape love that completes the Plan of Salvation of God the Father and His Son. A true vision of the Kingdom is more than a mind's eye picture of new stars and planets or a glorious city of gold. It includes the CHARACTER of the inhabitants perfected in agape love, service, peace, and joy. The Kingdom of God is a place where "God may be **all in all**"<sup>8</sup> for *eternity*! This is *how* "**the increase of His [empire] and peace there will be no end**"—it happens because the character of God the Father, Jesus Christ, and the Bride is perfect agape love!

May God's grace and peace be upon you!

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<sup>7</sup> Rev. 21:5.

<sup>8</sup> 1 Cor. 15:18; Eph 1:23.