

The Kingdom in My Brother

(Worshipping at the Altar of My Brother's Temple)

Luke 17:20-21 – Jesus to Pharisees: “The Kingdom is in the midst of you.”

1 Corinthians 3:16 – Paul: “You are God's temple...”

Introduction

1. Every lover of God has those memories of some very special moment when our Heavenly Father has touched our life directly and intimately. Or when Jesus has tenderly comforted “just me,” and let us know that he understood and cared for us. Who can ever forget, who cannot love, that kind of Father?
2. There is another reality in a Christian life, more painful. It might be best expressed in this passage from a letter I once received from a struggling young sister in faith: “Dear Pastor, I don't know whether I can continue in this church. Of course, I deeply love God and Christ. But the members! It is so hard to love the members. Maybe I could just go somewhere and love God along...”
3. What is the virtue of loving a sinless and perfect God and Christ, when we cannot love one another?

I'd like to speak about bringing the love of God and the love of man together.

Up There

1. Historically God has been enthroned on the altars of many beautiful churches and shrines. It is right for us to give Him such honor. But another historical and painful fact has been the struggle of the worshipper to allow God to come down from the altar into the relationships among our imperfect selves – to, indeed, see the altar and presence of God within a difficult brother or sister.
2. In the same way, we have often prayed to the God “up there” (point up to the sky), while bemoaning the difficulty of loving these people “down here” (point to the congregation!). This kind of separation of God from man in our thinking can lead to some subtle yet powerful problems in our faith and relationships. For example:

- we serve those “down here” because the God “up there” said we should. This approach may develop obedience or endurance or toleration, but it is not the source of genuine love.
- In fact, it can lead to a certain kind of wrong piety or self-righteousness (I serve the sinner out of “my virtue” but not out of true compassion for a son or daughter of God).
- Let us make an example. Someone does something good for you when you are sick in bed. You thank them, and the person replies, “I have to serve you, God ‘up there’ said I am supposed to. Besides, with every increase of my virtue I take another step closer to Heaven. Have a nice day.” That kind of reply wouldn’t sit well, would it?

How shocked the proud keepers of the law probably were when they heard Jesus utter these words in Matthew 25:

“...For I was hungry and you gave me food, I was thirsty and you gave me drink, I was a stranger and you welcomed me, I was naked and you clothed me, I was sick and you visited me, I was in prison and you came to me.” Then the righteous will answer him, “Lord, when did we see thee hunger and feed thee, or thirsty and give thee drink? And when did we see thee a stranger and feed thee, or thirsty and give thee drink? And when did we see thee a stranger and welcome thee, or naked and clothe thee? And when did we see thee sick or in prison and visit thee?” And the King will answer them, “Truly I say to you, as you did it to one of the least of these my brethren, you did it to me.”

Let’s take up the role of those with whom Jesus was speaking: “But your highness, we thought you lived in that castle up there!” In this verse, through the response of those to whom Jesus spoke, we can see this tendency to put God ‘up there’ in the castle, or leave Him, so often, lonely at the altar.

It is time to realize that the service and love of God and man is one service and one love only – 1 Corinthians 3:16 (you can repeat here).

Let us look more closely at that place in between God and man that is the place of the cross bearer.

Down Here

1. To love the God within my brother and sister, to love the potential of the Kingdom within them (even though that brother or sister may not see it themselves) is the much greater love.

(It is so easy to only see the obvious, unsavory part or fallen part of a person, so easy to accuse to analyze their wrongs. But as we focus on the evils of another, how many of us are, in the same moment, looking at them through our own “evil eyes.” It is a trick the devil likes to play, especially on the self-righteous. In short, we become what we focus on.)

2. To believe in God is good. But to believe in the God in my brother or sister (especially a difficult one), and to stay with them through the difficulties as they bring God forth from their life, this is the greatest believer. We all know how meaningful it is when there is someone in our life who believes in you, even though you may be in abandonment, or the prison of despair. (This is a good place for an example from your own experience. Or you can ask the congregation to reflect for a moment on someone who believed in them and saved them during a heavy times in their lives.)

3. A WONDERFUL SECRET

It is only as I can begin to believe in, serve and love the Spirit of God, the potential Kingdom in another, though it may be temporary hidden, that I can bring forth that same spirit of God from my own life, that same growing Kingdom. I will become what I focus on.

As we feed the hungry, give drink to the thirsty, welcome the stranger, clothe the naked, visit the sick and go to the prisoner, we will find that we are the very same hungry people, the thirsty, the strangers, the naked, the sick, and the prisoners who need our Heavenly Father just as much as the most destitute person we can find.

Conclusion

Brothers and sisters, our God and His Son have never needed more to come down from the altars, and get into our lives and relationships, to more in our society. The miracle won't come out of the clouds (please be careful about this statement in case of fundamental churches). The miracle, God wants us to know today, is in our hands.