

## **An Invisible Kingdom**

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Ever since the fall of the human race people have longed, consciously or unconsciously, for a return to the golden time and state of Eden. Yet, people soon lost the way and no longer knew what the kingdom of God was. It was to correct, expand and enlarge human ideas that the Lord often described that kingdom while on earth, sometimes in direct language, more often in parables and similes.

For the Jews before the Lord's advent, and even after it, the promised kingdom was to be an earthly one, established by the Messiah when He came—a kingdom of milk and honey which would extend over the whole earth, in which they would reign as kings and priests. Even for the disciples, the kingdom of which the Lord spoke seemed to be a future absolute monarchy which He would rule and in which they would be princes. Although these ideas were later refined, many Christians picture the future kingdom of God as an earthly place in which peace and prosperity, good and truth, will reign universally.

But if we really attend to the significance of all that the Lord said about His kingdom, we can see that these earthly ideas are erroneous. For the Lord, near the end of His earthly life, said to Pilate, "My kingdom is not of this world" (John 18:36). And, indeed, before that, throughout His ministry, He had taught about the spiritual, unobtrusive and subtle nature of the kingdom.

In His parables the Lord described the kingdom of God as a seed growing secretly, and springing up, without a person knowing how; as a tiny grain of mustard seed growing to become greater than all herbs; as good seed among which tares were sown; as leaven hidden in three measures of meal until the whole was leavened; and as treasure hidden in a field (see Matthew 13). And, in one of the most direct statements, He said, "The kingdom of God does not come with observation [outward show].... For, indeed, the kingdom of God is within you" (Luke 17:20-21).

The Lord's direct teaching was that His kingdom could not be observed, because it would not show itself to our bodily eyes. No one can say of it, "See here!" or "See there!" (Luke 17:21). For it will not be found in any of the things which people have hailed momentarily as the kingdom of God—not in a new political system, nor in any fortuitous set of happenings, nor yet in any brief burst of religious enthusiasm. All of these things, in time, fade and pass away, leaving people sadly disillusioned. The kingdom is, indeed, a very personal and individual thing, something in each person which does not appear in the physical world, except clothed in the garments of outward charity and truth.

Although the Lord described some of the characteristics of the kingdom, He never said exactly what it was. This was because no one living then, not even His disciples, was ready to understand and receive the truth. But in His second coming in the Heavenly Doctrine for the New Church, the Lord plainly tells us that His kingdom is His Divine truth, and that it is within a person when he seeks and acknowledges truth in the Word. This is the small seed within a person's spirit that grows in him, not quickly and spectacularly, but slowly and silently, so that the person "does not know how." A reflection of this can be seen in the development of a person's principles and ideas of truth from youth to old age, as the Divine truth begins to take

hold and to leaven the mind.

The seed to which the Lord compared His kingdom is the seed of truth in His Word. If this is taken in by a person it enters like something dead, for it is then mere knowledge of the Lord's teachings. But it is planted by the Lord into the inner recesses of the person's spirit, and there it is warmed and nourished by His love until it begins to live and move. Knowledge is thus transformed into living truth, and not only does this take place without the person knowing how, he is scarcely even aware of the change. Indeed, so slowly and secretly does this come about that people often fall into despair. They are disappointed, perhaps, that nothing seems to be happening. As far as they can tell, they are the same as before, with virtually all of their conscious life and thought seeming to be preoccupied with material concerns, limited by time and space, and bound to external duties and activities. They may despair of ever seeing the promised kingdom.

Yet if people are sincere in their longing, and if they continue to seek first that kingdom in the Lord's Word, then the Lord is secretly building His kingdom in their hearts and minds. This is a state of heaven into which they will consciously enter in eternal life. But something of that state comes through to their consciousness even on earth, they do not know not from where or how. The brief unexplainable pleasure in a task well done, a truth seen, a good perceived, are prophetic glimpses of the kingdom which the Lord is building, surely, if in secret, within us.