

LIVE FOR THE KINGDOM, NOT YOURSELF

Moving on, let's look at the words of the Lord Jesus that we find in Luke 12:31. "Rather, seek the kingdom of God, and all these things will be added unto you." Once again Jesus is addressing His disciples. Before considering the strategic effect of this command, let's review the immediate context. This verse is part of a larger passage that goes from verse 13 to verse 48. Jesus was presenting certain basic truths when a man interrupted Him with a question of selfish interest. The Lord used it to give some sound advice to the multitude, a word for everybody. "Take heed and beware of covetousness, for one's life does not consist in the abundance of the things he possesses." Then He told the parable of the rich fool, who reacted to material abundance like this: "My soul, you have many goods stored up for many years; relax, eat, drink, have fun!" But God said to him, "Fool! this very night your soul will be required of you; so who will get what you have prepared?" Then Jesus concluded, "So is he who lays up treasure for himself, and is not rich toward God."

In our society there is a general lack of understanding with reference to the basic values, the fundamental principles that apply to life on this planet--everyone's life, be he a Christian or not, whether he believes or understands it or not. Here Jesus states two of those principles: first, one's life does not consist in things (vs. 15--a warning against materialism); second, he who stores up treasure for himself is a fool (vs. 21--by the end of the chapter we'll see why). At verse 22 the Lord restricts the audience and addresses His disciples.

The Kingdom Mentality

The command that furnishes the strategy under discussion is really a summary of verses 22-34. These verses contain no less than ten commands, whether positive or negative, commands that distill a mentality, a mentality that revolves around the Kingdom of God. Please pause here and read Luke 12:22-34.

There are ten commands--"do not worry," "consider the ravens," "consider the lilies," "do not seek what you will eat or drink," "do not be anxious," "seek the Kingdom," "do not fear," "sell what you have," "give alms," "provide a treasure in heaven"--ten commands. These are **orders**, not optional points. They require a mentality that frees itself from the things and values of the world that surrounds us, a mentality that revolves around God's kingdom, that lives for it. If each evangelical believer had this mentality there would be no lack of workers to reach the world, nor would there be any lack of **money** to support them and underwrite the enterprise in general.

In verse 22 Jesus starts His comments with "therefore". He is building on the basic principles set out in verses 15-21. In verse 34 our passage ends with these words: "where your treasure is there your heart will be also." That's the big question! Where is your heart? Your heart, my friend, where is it? If it is in this world, you are to be pitied. Yes, because that means your treasure is here and this world is no place to have your treasure. "Because we brought nothing into the world and it is certain we can take nothing out" (1 Tim. 6:7). (Verse 8 continues, "having food and clothes let us be content with that.") We can send it on ahead, investing in the Kingdom, but we can't take it with us. From the perspective of eternity, whoever thinks only in terms of the few years we spend on this earth is truly a fool.

Focusing on verse 31, we note that Jesus made a promise. He declares that "all these things" **will** be added to those who live for the Kingdom. And what are "these things"? The immediate context makes clear that they are precisely what to eat, what to drink and what to wear. That's all! Isn't that strange? Jesus does not promise luxury, only the basics. I see at least two reasons for that. First, it is in accord with His own example (see Philipppians 2:5-8). Beginning with the circumstances of His birth He lived among the poor; He did manual labor; He traveled the dusty roads of Palestine on foot; during the three years of His public ministry He was financially dependent on others. (All of which would seem to be the sufficient answer to the 'children of the King' philosophy. It goes like this: we are sons of God; God is King; a son of a king is a prince; a prince may reasonably expect to live in a palace and go first class, etc. Isn't that an attractive idea? Only it doesn't follow--Jesus is not merely a son of God, He is **the** Son of God, and He didn't go first class in this world.)

Second, those who research such things inform us that some 50% of the people in today's world are undernourished, they have less than the basics. Another 40% have the basics, but no more. Only 10% of those who now inhabit our planet have more--they are the privileged few, in terms of material things. The logic of the situation seems to me to be obvious: of any ten workers available in God's hand nine should be allocated among the needy. And any spokesman for Christ who sets up shop as an island of plenty in a sea of poverty is self-contradictory--Jesus did not do that. He identified with the people. He is our example. When we lived in the village in the Amazon jungle our shanty was of palm leaves, much like the Indians'; we ate what they did, paddled a canoe, etc. We tried to identify with their situation. When in the city (Brasilia) we have a modest apartment (the zoning and building codes do not allow palm leaf shanties) and we drive a car (also modest)--to work in Brasilia without a car is inefficient. God may give us a comfortable situation, but He doesn't promise it. It is a question of context.

I imagine you are thinking of the promises made to the tither in the Old Testament. To be sure, material prosperity was promised to those who were faithful in tithing. In fact, I understand that God still blesses the tither, even though many of them seem to feel that the 90% belongs to them and how it is used is none of God's business. However, the tithe is no longer the standard. What Jesus expects of us is no longer 10%; He now expects 100%, everything! Isn't that what He said in Luke 14:33? "Whoever among you does not renounce all that he has cannot be my disciple." Is not "all" 100%? Is not 100% all? I know, you are objecting. The idea seems absurd! So how about us? What are we going to eat? In short, how can we possibly give 100%? Simple, just be a slave of Jesus!

Be a Slave of Christ!

When someone asks me how I view my relationship with Jesus Christ, and if there is time to explain, I say that I am His slave. I'm in good company since Paul (Romans 1:1), James (James 1:1), Peter (2 Peter 1:1) and Jude (Jude 1) said the same thing. It is a slavery that you choose because of love (see Exodus 21:1-6), love of Jesus, as a free and spontaneous act of the will. Presumably some will not like the idea of being a slave, but don't forget one little detail: everyone is a slave! It is an inherent aspect of the human condition. We are born as slaves, we live as slaves, we die as slaves. In John 8:34 the Lord Jesus declared: "Most assuredly I say to you, whoever commits sin is a slave of sin." Apart from God the human being has no option; he is born a sinner and remains a slave of sin until he dies. "Slave of sin" is another way of saying 'slave of self'--this is what destroys us; we are self-centered (it leads us to rebel against God)--and to be a slave of 'self' is to be a slave of Satan, because the unaided, self-centered person cannot withstand him. But Jesus offers a choice. Hallelujah! The choice is not to stop being a slave, oh no! The choice is to change masters.

I became a slave of Christ on the 13th of April, 1956, when I was almost twenty-two years old. I have been a 'believer' virtually from birth--I can't remember a time when I didn't believe in the Lord Jesus. I was a believer, but I wasn't a disciple; I had not yet surrendered my will. Before 4/13/56 I was still ruled by my own ideas and ambitions, my own wishes and desires. I was still trying to choose my own way, to guide my own steps. I had a bad time of it! It seemed like I was always 'falling on my face'. Of course. Wherever would a twenty-year-old gain the wisdom, the knowledge, the capacity to run his own life? When and from whom could he have learned it? (Or a forty-year-old, or a sixty-year-old--do you suppose the situation improves sufficiently?) The Bible states plainly that the human being is not competent to direct his own steps (here please read Jeremiah 10:23, Proverbs 28:26, Jeremiah 17:9 and Proverbs 20:24). Before I became a slave of Jesus I was under the control of a master that lacked understanding, lacked power and lacked competence--I was really in a bad way. Now I have a Master who has all knowledge, has all power, and loves me so much He died for me. What could be better than that?

Let's see how it works. Consider the situation of a slave in Jesus' time. Did he have any rights? No. Why did a slave exist? To serve, his owner. A slave owned nothing, not even himself. It follows that the owner must meet the slave's physical needs--the slave has nothing. For over forty years I have lived on the basis of Luke 12:22-34. For over forty years I have not known from month to month just how much God would give me; rarely has it been the same two months in a row. Yet neither I nor my wife and children have ever gone hungry. I have seen a time when there were at least four knots in my shoelaces, but I have never been without shoes. In short, we have never lacked.

If the owner gives an order that involves expense (e.g. to build a house), then he must furnish the materials, etc. In other words, what the owner orders he himself has to pay for. When Jesus orders something He pays for it. In my case He ordered two master's degrees and a doctorate. They cost plenty--Jesus paid everything; I have nothing. The distance I have traveled by air would girdle the globe more than once--Jesus paid it all; I have nothing. **What Jesus orders He pays for.**

In fact, I have just one major concern in life: to understand just what my Owner wants me to do. Once I am sure I move forward, without looking back. It is a sure thing. Can I imagine that my Master will go back on His word? Can I doubt His ability or willingness to supply my needs (Psalm 24:1)? Are there any other relevant doubts? I must confess that I find it hard to understand why so many believers refuse to be slaves (or true disciples, see chapter III) of Jesus, why they won't turn their lives over to Him. Can it be that they are asking the wrong question? I suppose many ask themselves, "What is it going to cost me to be a slave/disciple of Christ?" That is not the right question.

The correct question to ask is, "What will it cost me if I'm **not** His slave/disciple? Instead of thinking about what Jesus may demand, about giving up our ambitions and desires, about maybe being sent to the jungle to work with 'Indians', we should really think about the consequences of refusing to surrender our lives to Jesus. The price you pay for not living for Christ's kingdom is to lose your life. That's all it costs, just your life! Consider the words of the Lord Jesus recorded in Luke 9:24-25. Let's begin with verse 23. "If anyone desires to come after me let him deny himself, take up his cross each day and follow me. For whoever wants to save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for my sake, he will save it. For what will it profit a man to gain the whole world but waste or forfeit himself?" What does the Lord mean when He speaks of losing one's "life"? One does not lose one's soul for love of Christ. Nor is the reference to being killed. Rather, Jesus has in mind the life we live, the accumulated results of our living. All that I have done up to this moment plus all that I will yet do until overtaken by death or the rapture of the Church, whichever happens first—that is the "life" that is at risk (in my own case).

Let's look at our Lord's words a little more closely. There seems to be a contradiction here--if you lose, you save; if you want to save, you lose. How can it work? The following context helps us out. In verse 26 Jesus explains verses 24-25 in terms of His second coming. The parallel passage, Matthew 16:27, is clearer. "For the Son of Man is going to come in the glory of his Father, with his angels, and then he will repay each according to his deeds." Christ was thinking of the day of reckoning. In other words, "we will all stand before the judgment seat of Christ" (Romans 14:10) and "each of us will give account of himself to God" (Romans 14:12). "For we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ, so that each one may receive his due according to what he has done while in the body, whether good or bad" (2 Cor. 5:10). I understand that 1 Corinthians 3:11-15 is referring to the same occasion, the day of reckoning. After declaring that Jesus Christ is the only foundation, Paul speaks of different materials that one might use in building on it: "gold, silver, precious stones" or "wood, hay, straw". (Although the primary interpretation of this passage presumably has to do with the performance of teachers and leaders in the church, I believe it clearly applies to the daily life of each believer as well.) The point is, our deeds will be tested by fire. If fire has any effect upon gold or silver it is only to purify them, but its effect on hay and straw is devastating! Okay, so what?

Let's go back to the beginning. God created the human being for His glory; to reflect it and contribute to it. I suppose we may understand Psalm 19:1 and Isaiah 43:7 in this way, at least by extension. But Adam lost this capacity when he rebelled against God. For this reason the sentence that weighs against our race is that we "fall short of the glory of God" (Romans 3:23). But the Son came into the world to restore our lost potential. Ephesians 1:12 and 14 tell us that the object of the plan of salvation is "the praise of His glory" (see also 2 Cor. 1:20). And 1 Corinthians 10:31 puts it into a **command**: "Whether you eat or drink, or whatever you do, do all to the glory of God." Now then, the point of all this is not to 'ruin' our lives, to take all the 'fun' out of them (as many seem to think). God isn't being arrogant, unreasonable, too demanding. Quite the contrary--He is just trying to save us from throwing away our lives. Sure, because the glory of God is eternal (Psalm 104:31), and when I do something for His glory that something is transformed and acquires eternal value--it becomes "gold, silver, precious stones". Works done for the glory of God will go through the fire without harm. On the other hand, what is done with a view to our own ambitions and ideas is "straw". We all know what fire does to straw!

So there it is. To be a slave of Christ means to live with reference to the Kingdom; it means to do everything for the glory of God. In this way the slave "saves" his life because he will be building it with "gold and silver", which will pass through the fire at the judgment seat of Christ without loss. In contrast, the believer who refuses to be a slave of Jesus builds his life with "hay and straw", which will be consumed by the fire--and so he "loses" his life; he lived in vain; the potential that his life represented was wasted, thrown away. What a tragedy!

(I suppose there might be someone who will say: "Okay, okay! I get the point. I'm throwing away my life. So what? What business is it of yours? If I want to lose my life that's my problem!" Well, sure, that's right, it is your problem. But I wish you would consider one detail: the problem is not exclusively yours; it isn't just **yours**! It also concerns the individuals who should have been reached through your life but weren't. And it concerns Christ Himself who was cheated out of His right in your life.)

I conclude that every believer should live in terms of the Kingdom, should be a true disciple of Christ, should be a slave of Jesus. But I don't want to leave the impression that everyone should live just like I have (also, I have not been a perfect example of a slave or disciple; I regret to say that now and again I still rebel against my Master--I am a sinner). I imagine that God's will for many, if not most, will involve a regular salary or wage. The basic issue is our mentality. Around what does our life revolve? What are we living for? Deep down inside are we depending on God, or on the salary? And that salary, who's in charge of it?

It does not follow that everyone is supposed to be poor. Not necessarily. In fact, I would say that some people have the 'ministry' of making money. I say "ministry" because God gives the money to be invested in the Kingdom. The names of several men come to mind who had this ministry. They were multi-millionaires. God blessed them to a remarkable extent, presumably because they had the mentality of the Kingdom. They understood that all they received was not to be wasted on themselves. They invested 90% of their profit in the cause of Christ--that was their function in the kingdom of God. The basic issue is our mentality.

To sum it up, being a slave of Jesus involves unconditional surrender, a total commitment to Him. However, I can imagine that someone may be thinking: "Well, that whole song and dance may work all right in areas where everyone has plenty, but here in Brazil [or wherever] it's different. Here we're in the middle of a serious economic crisis, and furthermore most of the evangelical believers in this country are really poor." This question deserves careful evaluation.

Are We Too Poor?

Can we say that we are too poor? Is obeying the commands of Christ the exclusive privilege of the rich? How about the first believers, there in Jerusalem, were they rich or poor? It would appear that the vast majority were poor; so much so that the few well-to-do were selling their property to feed the rest. (That's what gave rise to the case of Ananias and Sapphira [Acts 4:32-5:11].) They evidently didn't want to leave Jerusalem, in spite of the Lord's words recorded in Luke 24:49 and Acts 1:8. So God Himself sent the persecutions to disperse them. And they scattered, preaching as they went, poor though they were.

In 2 Corinthians 8:1-5 we find an account that is very much to the point. Those Macedonian believers were very poor ("extreme poverty"). Furthermore, they were experiencing a "severe test of affliction". Even so, they insisted on giving. From verse 4 it almost seems that Paul felt a bit embarrassed about asking them to give--they needed help themselves! But they insisted; they wanted to give. And they gave more than they properly could ("beyond their ability"). But how was that possible? They had the mentality of the Kingdom --in verse 5 we read that "**first** they gave themselves to the Lord". And they must have understood the secret of God's economy, as described in 2 Corinthians 9:8. Before looking at that secret I would like to take up the question of **our** poverty as we contemplate a world perishing without Christ.

One thinks of the feeding of the five thousand (Mark 6:31-44, Matthew 14:13-21, Luke 9:10-17, John 6:1-13). Jesus tried to get away from the crowds, going by boat to an isolated spot. But someone figured it out and the crowd ran along the shore and got there first. As always, He was

moved with compassion, because they were like sheep without a shepherd. So He went to teaching them, the whole day. Finally the disciples stepped up and urged Him to dismiss the crowd; it was getting late, and there was no source of food nearby. So you remember the Lord's response to their initiative? "**You** give them something to eat!" Have you ever thought about that? Really? Then please tell me, what with? Just how could the disciples obey that command?

Let's pause and recall the scene. The Sacred Text affirms that there were about five thousand men, **without counting the women and children**. Now then, whenever you see a crowd of people, what is there usually the most of--isn't it women and children? In other words, I suppose that crowd was made up of at least 15,000 people. Okay, now try to imagine that you are one of those twelve disciples and you have just heard the Master say: "**You** feed them!" Now what? Did the disciples have anything? As a matter of fact, no. They had neither money (which wouldn't have helped much since they were a long way from town) nor food. Even the five loaves and two fish belonged to somebody else.

Can it be that Jesus was playing a joke on them, or was He serious? I don't know, but I prefer to think that He would not make a joke out of such a situation. But if He was serious, how could the disciples obey? Only with a miracle. In fact, they couldn't see a solution and gave the problem back to Jesus to solve; which He did. But did Jesus Himself hand the bread and fish to the crowd? No. Let's think about that scene a little more and we'll see that the disciples still had to exercise faith.

The Record affirms that they all ate until they were "full" or "satisfied". It wasn't just a little something to tide them over. Have you ever considered how much bread and fish it would take to fill 15,000 people (who had gone without lunch)? It seems to me certain that when Jesus blessed and broke those loaves and fish there was not an instant multiplication such that there was enough for everybody; the tremendous pile would have buried Jesus, the disciples and the closest of the people! Really. Just stop and think about it. It must not have been instantaneous. When Jesus placed some bread and fish in the hands of each disciple that's all there was, up to that moment.

Now then, try to imagine that you are one of those disciples with a handful of bread and fish, and you have to feed at least a thousand people (12 disciples and 15,000 people). Can you picture it? Wouldn't you feel just a little ridiculous taking that first step toward the crowd? Somehow the disciples find the courage and approach the people. The first one helps himself and, wonder of wonders, the supply is undiminished! The second one helps himself and the supply is unchanged. It was never used up--as they went around distributing the food kept multiplying. If they had tired and stopped in the middle, half the people would have stayed hungry. If the disciples had decided to eat first, I rather imagine that the miracle would have been frustrated and the crowd would have gone hungry. The disciples ate last but they ate very well, thank you very much! (Have you ever tried eating a bushel of bread?)

I tend to chuckle as I imagine that scene, until I remember that the Lord Jesus is still saying to us: "**You** give them something to eat!"--only this time we face some 3,000 ethnic nations and 2.5 billion people that are perishing for lack of the Bread of Life. And we, like the disciples of old, tend to say, "What with, Lord?" As long as we look at our empty hands we will not find the courage to accept the challenge of reaching the lost world. But it doesn't depend on our empty hands, it depends on **Jesus'** full hands! It doesn't depend on our weakness and smallness, it depends on Jesus, on His power and wealth. We must learn how to cooperate with God, and really do it. In short, we need to understand how God's economy operates.

God's Economy

All of chapters 8 and 9 of 2 Corinthians deal with money, in one way or another. But the description of how God's economy operates begins at 9:6. This verse enunciates a fundamental principle that has global application. "Whoever sows sparingly will also reap sparingly, and whoever sows bountifully will also reap bountifully."

Any farmer understands that. If he only plants a few beans that's all he'll get. If he wants more he has to plant more. Any businessman will also understand it. If he wants money he has to invest it. But there is one detail that can be quite bothersome--we must plant first, and reap later. It is better to tighten your belt than to eat the seed, no matter how hungry you are. Isn't it obvious? If you eat the seed you won't have anything to plant, and if you plant nothing you reap nothing!

In the Creator's goodness nature is often quite generous. I suppose corn is the champion. We usually plant three or four kernels in a hill, but suppose we just plant one. If that grain germinates we get one stalk. That stalk should produce two good ears (a third ear will likely be a nubbin). Now then, have you ever counted the number of kernels on an ear of corn? I have. A poor ear may have 300 kernels. A good ear will have around 500. A **super** ear can have up to 800! Let's suppose our stalk gives us two good ears--we planted one kernel and got back 1,000! Isn't that a deal? Even beans that only give us several dozen to one are a deal. That is God's way.

As already noted the context is financial, and verse 7 makes clear that when the author speaks of planting and harvesting he wants us to apply the principle to giving. "God loves a cheerful giver." I believe the following conclusion is beyond reasonable doubt: whoever gives nothing receives nothing. Maybe that's why many believers, including those in "full-time Christian service", often seem to be in a financial bind. They don't give; they never contribute. Luke 6:38 shows the reaction of men and Proverbs 3:9-10 that of God when someone gives.

And now for the 'secret'; it's in verse 8. "Further, God is powerful to make all grace abound to you so that, always having all sufficiency in everything, you may abound to every good work" (2 Cor. 9:8). Let's consider the meaning with care. It is **God** who is powerful, not us. He it is who will cause to abound, not we ourselves. And what He causes to abound to us is "all grace". The grace in view here is the grace of giving (as in 2 Cor. 8:1, "the grace of God given to the churches of Macedonia," which was precisely the grace to give, even beyond their means). Now the Text piles up emphatic words: "always, all, sufficiency, everything, abound, every." All that emphasis serves to guarantee two results: we ourselves should always have enough (at least), and we should be a significant channel of blessing to others. Let's see how it works.

I understand that it is as follows. God wants us to be channels, conduits through which He can send a flow of blessings, both material and spiritual, to others. Much of what we receive may not be intended for our own use--it has another address and we are supposed to pass the blessing along (the precise address must be discerned through the Spirit). When we get the point and cooperate with God, He sends more. The more sensitive and faithful we are, the more God sends, an ever increasing flow of blessings. But if God sends a blessing, suppose a sum of money, that has another destination and we choose not to understand, decide not to cooperate, if we retain it for ourselves we become like a water pipe that corrodes shut. (Now a plugged pipe is a sad thing; it has lost its reason for being.) With that the flow of God's grace through our lives is stanchied, because He stops sending it. Sure. Why should God keep on sending if we won't let it pass? Can it be that our churches are full of 'plugged pipes'?

When we cooperate with God He gains, the others gain, and we gain. But whoever holds back or abstains will be cheating himself, others and even God. Consider verses 9-14. Verse 9 is a quote from Psalm 112:9, bearing on the last clause of verse 8. Now verses 10 and 11: "He who supplies seed to the sower and bread for food will supply and multiply your seed and increase the fruits of your righteousness, you being enriched in everything for all generosity, which produces thanksgiving to God through us." This is marvelous! God even gives the seed to be planted, and lest we eat the seed He also gives us bread to eat. He wants us to plant, He wants to see fruit! When we are faithful and cooperate, then God not only meets our needs but augments our planting; in other words, He increases our generosity, or at least He will do so to the extent that we cooperate with His purpose. As a reasonable and proper consequence of this process God receives what He deserves: the beneficiaries give praise and thanks to Him.

Verse 12 and 13 elaborate on this aspect. When we line ourselves up with God's economy He receives the glory due Him, the needs of the saints are supplied, and we are blessed. First, the people who receive the benefits from our ministry will pray for us, and certainly God will listen to those prayers. Next, even if they don't pray, our obedience will receive the effects of God's faithfulness. This we

know, not only from the promises and affirmations in this passage, but as an inference from God's own interests--a faithful and useful 'water pipe' must not die of hunger.

So there it is, my friends. God is no man's debtor. That is worth repeating: **God will not be anybody's debtor!** We are too small; He will not allow Himself to be in debt to the likes of us. We may rest assured: whoever gives much, receives much; whoever gives little, receives little; whoever gives nothing, . . . It seems to me that this principle, much like the tithe, works even when one's motivation is selfish or self serving. However, I trust that the reader will agree that my whole appeal has been against selfishness. It is because of the "mercies of God" that we should present our lives as a "living sacrifice" (Romans 12:1). It is the privilege and pleasure of participating in God's grace that should motivate us to give. I believe it is fair to say that our prosperity is in our own hands, at least in part (unfortunately it is also true that we may suffer because of others' disobedience, just as they may suffer because of ours). What is more, the financial condition of the missionary enterprise is also in our hands. If we cooperate with God there will be no lack of money to support the missionaries that He is calling, as well as underwrite every other aspect of the work.

The "Faith Promise Offering"

There is a procedure that is widely used in our day to raise money for missions called "faith promise giving". I understand it to be a specific application of the truth given in 2 Corinthians 9:8. I will use the example of a local church, though it will work for an individual (or a whole denomination, for that matter) as well. (Some years ago I expounded this procedure in a church and only one man took up the challenge--soon he, all by himself, was giving more to missions than the rest of the church put together.) The principle applies irrespective of the size of the group. Here's how it works.

The church organizes a missions conference--once a year, presumably (the procedure would work without the conference, but it is good for informing, challenging and generating interest). Each person is urged to seek God's face and ask, "Lord, how much do You want to send to missions through me during this year?" Let's go slowly to make sure we understand the idea. Notice first that we are asking what **God** is going to send. It isn't a question of trying to squeeze a spare dime out of an inadequate income. Nor are we to take away from our tithe or other commitments that exist with our church or other agencies of God's Kingdom. I would go further--it isn't even a matter of modifying our domestic budget or lifestyle, necessarily (though we need to ask ourselves if we are wasting God's resources). No, the idea is to see what **God** is going to do. He will supply in surprising, even miraculous ways. But when He does, that money is sacred, it is for missions! (Please don't eat the 'seed'.)

Okay. So each one makes his agreement with God. Then all are asked to put the amount (in monthly or yearly terms) on a slip of paper and these are collected. These slips of paper are not legally binding--they are a 'faith promise'. They are a statement of what we believe God will do during the year. The statements are collected and added up so the church can have a general idea of how much should come in for missions that year. In this way existing commitments to missionaries and ministries can be renewed, added to, or whatever. Evidently such commitments will also be by faith and all concerned should understand what is involved.

I have suggested that the "faith promise offering" is a specific application of the truth in 2 Corinthians 9:8, but I see one difference. In God's economy as described above, the initiative lies with the Holy Spirit and it is up to us to be alert and sensitive to discern when to pass on a blessing. With the "faith promise offering" we deliberately seek God's face with a view to a specific proposal in advance, which may also include the beneficiary. It so happens that it works, and with tremendous results. By now there must be thousands of churches that use this procedure.

At times, when a church first hears about this, the leaders are quite dubious. They figure it must be some kind of 'con' game and that any money given to missions will in fact be subtracted from the regular giving to the church. However, as it is reiterated that the idea is not to re-route normal church giving but to see God bring in extra money from other sources, sometimes they agree to put the idea to the test. When a church does decide to give it a try the result is usually as follows. All the money promised by faith for missions does indeed come in during the twelve month period. The

regular budget of the church actually improves. If they are in a building program it moves faster than expected. The attendance increases. In short, God blesses that church. Examples abound.

I wish to emphasize that this principle works even if a people is poor. In 1975 I was at the missions conference of the Peoples Church, Toronto, Canada (that was the year they broke the million dollar barrier). One of the speakers was an evangelical leader from Liberia and he recounted what happened when his people decided to put into practice the faith promise offering for missions. His people live in the interior in a semi-desert region where life is difficult. They are very poor. With tears coursing down his face he told us that they had just given the equivalent of \$8,000 to missions in one year. Can you imagine it? A people who live in poverty, but whose God is **GREAT**.

Just consider what we could do if each believer gave only 1% of his income for missions; but there are churches that do much more. Some years ago I heard of a church in the Philippines (recall that the economic situation there is not good). At that time they had 500 members and supported 50 missionaries. On average each ten members supported one missionary. It can be done!

What do you say, folks? We have the necessary resources, both human and financial. What is lacking is commitment to the Cause; what is lacking is the mentality of the Kingdom. If all evangelical believers would really start living for Christ we would take the world by storm. Shall we go for it?

The Accounting

Before bringing this chapter to a close I wish to return to Luke 12. Our discussion of the 'Kingdom mentality' stopped at verse 34, but the Lord's discourse continues and we need to consider verses 35-48. They relate to our subject. Without stopping, apparently, Jesus started to speak of His return, the second coming--note especially verses 35-36 and 40. Then Peter asks if that word (vs. 40) was just for them, or for everybody. For reply the Lord says that whoever receives a stewardship is a steward, and must give an accounting for what was entrusted to him. Then in verse 46 He proffers this dire warning--the irresponsible steward will be assigned a place among the **unbelievers**!

Now consider verses 47 and 48: "The servant who knew his master's will yet neither got ready nor acted according to that will shall be beaten with many blows, but one who didn't know, albeit doing something deserving of blows, will be beaten with few. From everyone who has been given much, much will be demanded; . . ." We are looking at the accounting, the judgment seat of Christ. It is important to notice that this word is addressed to His disciples, and even more specifically to Peter, being an answer to his question. It is the **servant** who knew and didn't obey that will be punished with many blows. (I don't know what form those "blows" will take, but it may be related to the pain and loss of seeing one's life burned up--recall what has already been said about the cost of not being a slave of Jesus.)

The servant who knew and didn't do, . . . And what about us, my friends, what about us? Don't we know the will of our Master? Doesn't our Bible contain Matthew 28:19, Mark 16:15 or Acts 1:8? Have we never heard of Christ's commands? Is "the Great Commission" a strange expression to our ears? Whatever are we going to do when we face the accounting, when Jesus queries us about the unreached ethnic nations, when He asks us why half the people in the world continue to die without having heard the Gospel? How will we explain our omission, our terrible irresponsibility? What can we say?

We need to consider that our "stewardship" is very great. The Word of God has existed in English for centuries. More evangelical literature and tools for Bible study exist in English than any other language. We have more people with theological training than any other culture, etc. 2 Peter 3:12 speaks of "hastening the coming" of the day of God. The point is, we have choice, we have will. Our choices have value; they make a difference. We actually can speed up the return of Christ--it follows, of necessity, that we can also slow it down (within the limits imposed by God's sovereignty). That is why there is an accounting. That is why Jesus is going to require the investment/ stewardship that our life represents, namely all that we are and have.

One more thing. God has placed in our hands an unprecedented technology. Is this without purpose? I doubt it. God isn't in the habit of engaging in random activity. I gather that it is this

generation that has the privilege, and responsibility, of fulfilling the Great Commission, of finishing what remains to do before Christ comes again. If the generation of the Apostles, being few in number and with limited resources, managed to reach its world, why can't we reach **our** world in this generation? We are so many! We have so much!

My father traveled by horseback in the Bolivian hinterland searching out the settlers scattered in the jungle. On one of those trips he got sick--he barely made it to the humble dwelling of a young couple 'lost' in the forest. He fell into his hammock and was delirious for two weeks, with a high fever. The couple kept him alive with tea and broth. Finally word reached the town where we lived and an army truck went out to pick him up--he arrived home a month later. Thirty years later his son also traveled about the Amazon jungle, looking for indigenous peoples--only I used an airplane and carried a two-way radio (I have also traveled by canoe and on foot, but that's another story). I also got sick on one of those trips. I turned on the radio transmitter and informed my colleagues in the city, asking for prayer (just that was a real comfort that my father didn't have—I was no longer alone). When it did not please the Lord to heal me I called for the plane and a few hours later was on my way to the city and medical resources. What a difference thirty years made! Today missionaries are taking laptop computers (powered by flashlight batteries) to the jungle. We have satellites, television, etc., etc.

Considering the Kingdom mentality one more time, I would like to make an appeal. My dear people, let us exorcise the spirit of denominationalism that is endemic among us. I understand that differing denominations can be useful, and even necessary, for practical reasons. If I want to give a new convert a complete bath while someone else only wants to wet his head, it can be awkward for both of us to minister under the same roof. We might well choose different roofs precisely to preserve the peace and not be quarreling over a detail that is not a condition for salvation. But that should not keep us from cooperating in the basic task, the fulfilling of Christ's commands. Rather than acting as if we have a corner on the truth and fighting among ourselves, let's concentrate our fire against the enemy of our souls. In the face of a lost world we need to join forces--no denomination has what it takes to finish the job alone. When we think of the ethnic nations that have never been reached and the difficulties inherent in transcultural work, a common effort is imposed upon us. Such a common effort will include the specialized entities that God has raised up to make available to the churches the requisite experience, know-how and infrastructures that they lack (and would take many years to acquire). Such entities should be considered as an extension of the churches, not as 'competition'. We can respect each other, recognize a variety of convictions about secondary points and still join hands to take on a world without Christ. May God help us.

In order for us to finish reaching the whole world and fulfill Christ's Great Commission we are basically lacking but one thing, **the mentality of the Kingdom!**