

Matt. 21: 43 - Therefore say I unto you: The Kingdom of God shall be taken from you, and given to a nation bringing forth the fruits thereof.

This is a terrible word - a word of solemn and significant judgment. One could almost say: harsh & heartless judgment if one listens superficially. For how is it possible that this Jesus, whom we have come to know as the loving and forgiving One, could be so heartless and callous as to indicate that this most precious property, the Kingdom of God belonging to Israel for so many ages, would be taken away from them? Had it ~~the~~ not become theirs by a promise of God - so specific and so secure that there was not the least possibility of losing it? Was this people of the Old Testament not the elect of every nation chosen by God as a proof of his special love and care to them? (First question)

What <sup>did</sup> Israel and its leaders completely and very conveniently forget - and what we as the new Israel, the people of God of the new Testament, many times also forget - is that the Kingdom of God was a gift - a very special and wondrous gift of God to his people and to the world. It was 'nt theirs, and it is 'nt ours by right - or moral - no church and no christian has <sup>any</sup> legal claim to it. That is why Christ uses the words take and give in our text: a clear proof that Israel had no right to view the Kingdom of God as legitimate church property which they could

dispose of and deal with, according to their  
→ own will and inclination. Do we realize this well  
enough? That the Kingdom of God is God's most  
wonderful gift offered us in and through his Son  
and that we cannot deal with it according to  
our own fickle nature and wishes?

II We must ask another question - of great impor-  
tance to the life of the church and the Christian:  
Is it possible to lose this gift?  
How does one lose this gift? How did Israel lose  
it? Surely such a valuable possession is worth  
retaining as long as possible! Nobody would like  
to lose it through ignorance or <sup>blindness or</sup> neglect! Christ gives  
the answer when he says: "The Kingdom of God shall  
be taken from you, and given to a nation bringing  
forth the fruits thereof". This was the crucial test:  
does the life and ~~feeling~~ <sup>love</sup> of the nation who has  
been entrusted with God's Kingdom prove that  
it has understood the nature of this Kingdom,  
has yielded to it, has voluntarily submitted  
itself to its spirit, its laws, its aims? If  
so, the lives of these people, the citizens of  
this Kingdom, will prove it: their <sup>strengths</sup> weaknesses,  
<sup>words</sup> their actions will have a quantity, a depth,  
a beauty which will be clearly evident for anyone  
who wishes to see!

→ But these fruits do not grow automatically -  
they must be cultivated by diligent labour, of  
the might into Christ's mind, of prayer, of service  
and sacrifice. In fact the final test, says Christ,  
whether you are part of his Kingdom is your personal  
relation to Christ himself. It lies in the answer to  
this question: Do you find Christ a stumbling block  
in your life or a corner stone? The sin of the

stone referred to the practice of those times when a big stone was used (either as a <sup>junction, as</sup> corner stone) to hold two or more important walls together or as a crowning stone above the main entrance. The whole building there was real danger that you may stumble across it and fall or that it may fall down from its lofty height and fall crush to pieces anyone foolish enough to stand pit his strength against it!

Yes, says Christ in effect. This is the test for entering God's Kingdom: Where do I fit into your life, the life of your church, your community, your nation? Am I the Key, the <sup>testing stone</sup> ~~stone~~ to your existence - or just an after thought, an appendix? <sup>Two possible answers:</sup> ~~right~~ right rejected Christ but by trying to wade the issues which he brought in their way, have stumbled over the cornerstone and fell - perhaps cursing this obstacle lying in their way! - what does Christ mean to you? Is He your test in attitude, in human relations, in church policy, in social witness, in judgments on right and wrong? Is it Christ only, or Christ and, or none of Christ?

III We must ask a third question: Does it affect a whole nation if its spiritual leaders alone become involved in a controversy with Christ? Christ's issue lay with the spiritual leaders, the clerics, and seemingly the people were just passive participants, onlookers on the scene. This may be our view, but it is not <sup>that of Scripture</sup> ~~Christ's~~. Here He is on his way to the cross, and this parable in Matt. 21 and especially our text holds in the solemn announcement that the Kingdom will be taken away from the nation as such: preachers, priests and people!

~~Primarily~~ The future destiny of the whole nation depends primarily on the attitudes and actions of the spiritual leaders - the preachers, the prophets, the priests! What a serious moral obligation this holds in for every <sup>bishop and</sup> pastor, every minister, every moderator and minister, to proclaim Christ in all his fulness - and Christ alone!

But this does not exonerate or exempt the people of God, the members of the church from their moral responsibility to be true in spirit and word and deed to their Christian faith and witness - cost what it may! Whether we are called to the ministry of the word and sacrament or of discipleship we all share in the responsibility - and we all pay the price of disloyalty, dissimilarity, distrust! It was because of such indifference, such apathy, such wilful blindness and callousness of heart that the solemn prophecy of Christ became reality: The Kingdom of God shall be taken from you!

But, please note, this is not the last word - one of severity and judgment - God's last word to man is always an offer: It shall be given! God did not withdraw his Kingdom from earth - He entrusted it to us, his people of the new covenant, his elect of every nation to become his holy bride! We who know Him and love Him, we are the partakers in His Kingdom - a Kingdom of truth and love and purity and humility and service and sacrifice! Do we realize this, and do our lives prove it? - Does it become so visible that people outside the Kingdom while watching us are caught up in this ever growing longing to become part of the Kingdom of Christ!