CHAPTER 5

Hearing and Seeing


As Jesus was equipping the Twelve for the work of the apostleship, it was necessary for them to hear and see His words and works. This was an important aspect of their training. Their eyes and ears needed to witness the facts of an unparalleled life - the life of Jesus. This was indispensable preparation for bearing witness of Him in the future. The Apostles could only get people to believe their wonderful story by being able to preface it with the assertion, “What we have seen and heard we proclaim to you...” (I John 1:3). None would believe their report except those who were satisfied that it came from men who had been with Jesus. Therefore, the third evangelist (Luke) who was not an Apostle, but one of their companions, presents his Gospel with all confidence to his friend, Theophilus, as a genuine history. It was no mere collection of fables, because its contents were confirmed by those who were eyewitnesses and ministers of the Word from the beginning.

During the early period of their discipleship, hearing and seeing seem to have been the main occupation of the Twelve. Then they were like children born into a new world. Their first (but by no means their least) important lesson was to use their senses to observe the wonderful things taking place all around them.

The things which the Twelve saw and heard were certainly wonderful. The great Actor in the astounding drama was careful to impress on His followers the magnitude of their privilege. On one occasion He said to them, “Blessed are the eyes which see the things you see, for I say to you, that many prophets and kings wished to see the things which you see, and did not see them, and to hear the things which you hear, and did not hear them” (Luke 10:23-24). Yet certain generations of people in Israel had seen very remarkable things. Some had seen the wonders of the Exodus and the grandeur connected with the lawgiving at Mount Sinai. Others had witnessed the miracles done by Elijah and Elisha. Later generations had been privileged to listen to the wonderful oracles spoken by David, Solomon, Isaiah, and the rest of the prophets. But the things witnessed by the Twelve far surpassed the wonders of all the past ages. For one greater than Moses, or Elijah, or David, or Solomon, or Isaiah was here. The promise to Nathanael was being fulfilled. Heaven had been opened, and the angels of God - the spirits of wisdom, power, and love - were ascending and descending on the Son of Man.
Now we may take a rapid survey of the *mirabilia* (Latin: wonders) which the Twelve had the unique privilege to see and hear. This happened, more or less, during the whole period of their discipleship, and especially right after they were chosen as Apostles. These may be considered under two headings: 1) the Doctrine of the Kingdom, and 2) the Philanthropic Work of the Kingdom.

**The Doctrine of the Kingdom**

Before Jesus’ ministry began, His forerunner (John the Baptist) had appeared in the wilderness of Judea preaching and saying, “Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand” (Matt. 3:2). Some time after they were chosen, the Twelve were sent out into the towns and villages of Galilee to repeat the Baptist’s message. But Jesus did something more than proclaim the coming of the kingdom. He explained the nature of the divine kingdom, described the character of its citizens, and differentiated between genuine and fake members of the holy body. He did this, in part, in the Sermon on the Mount, which was preached shortly after He chose the Apostles. He also did it through certain parables which He told within the same time frame. In the great sermon delivered on the mountain top, the qualifications for citizenship in the kingdom of heaven were laid out. He first spoke positively, then comparatively. The positive truth was summed up in seven golden sentences called the Beatitudes. Here the joy of the kingdom was represented as being altogether independent of the outward conditions. In contrast, worldly happiness was associated with externals. According to the Preacher, the blessed were the poor, the hungry, the mournful, the meek, the merciful, the pure in heart, the peaceable, the sufferers for righteousness’ sake. These were blessed and were a source of blessing to the human race. They were the salt of the earth, the light of the world. They were raised above others in spirit and character in order to draw them upwards and lead them to glorify God.

Next, and with more detail, Jesus presented the *righteousness* of the kingdom and of its citizens. He compared it to the righteousness that dominated the people of that day. He spoke with a solemn emphasis, “...unless your righteousness surpasses that of the scribes and Pharisees, you shall not enter the kingdom of heaven” (Matt. 5:20). Then He illustrated and enforced the general proposition by giving a detailed description of counterfeit righteousness in its moral and religious aspects. Specifically, he dealt with the way the moral law was interpreted and the manner in which spiritual disciplines were practiced, such as prayer, giving (alms), and fasting. In one aspect, He characterized the righteousness of the Pharisees as superficial and technical; in another way, it was showy, complacent, and critical of others. In contrast to this kind of righteousness, He described the *ethics* of the kingdom as a pure stream of life with love as its fountainhead. It was a morality of the heart, not just of outward conduct. It was a morality that was also broad and universal. It jumped over all arbitrary barriers which had been arrogantly and selfishly erected by the interpreters of the law. He set forth the religion of the kingdom as humble, reserved, and devoted in singleness of heart to God and to things divine. Its root is faith in God as a kind, gracious Father. Its fruit is contentment, cheerfulness, and freedom from
worldly cares. Finally, it refrains itself in dealing with those who profane the name of God and is opposed to severe judging. In fact, it is opposed to judging at all and leaves people to be judged by God.

The message (you have just been given a quick outline) made a powerful impression on the audience. We read, “...the multitudes were amazed at His teaching; for He was teaching them as one having authority (the authority of wisdom and truth), and not as their scribes” (who only had the authority of office) (Matt. 7:28-29). It is not likely that either the multitude or the Twelve understood the sermon, because it was both deep and lofty. Their minds were preoccupied with very different ideas about the coming kingdom. Yet the implication of all that had been said was clear and simple. The kingdom of which Jesus was both the King and the Lawgiver was not to be a kingdom of this world. It was not to be here on earth, nor out there in space. It was to be within the heart of man. It would not be the monopoly of any class or nation, but open to all who had the required spiritual attributes on equal terms. Nowhere in the sermon does Jesus say that keeping ritual ceremonies, like circumcision, was not necessary for admission into the kingdom. But circumcision is ignored here, as it was ignored throughout the teaching of Jesus. It is treated as something that is simply out of place. It cannot be dove-tailed into the pattern of doctrine which is presented. The very mention of it would have been incompatible with the rest of His message and would have seemed strange. How true this is. Anyone can put this issue to rest by just imagining for a moment that among the Beatitudes, one had been found that read like this: “Blessed are the circumcised, for no uncircumcised ones shall enter into the kingdom of heaven.” It was a significant silence concerning the seal of the national covenant which could not fail to have an effect on the minds of the disciples. It was a hint that circumcision would eventually pass into history.

Jesus taught these significant truths first by delivering an ethical sermon. At other times He would popularize the same truths by using parables. Over the course of His ministry, He uttered many parabolic sayings. It was one of His favorite types of instruction. Approximately thirty parables have been preserved for us in the Gospels. Most of them were spoken on specific occasions and are best understood when viewed together with the circumstances which gave rise to them. But there is a special group of eight which seem to have been spoken around the same period of time. They were designed to serve one purpose: to display in simple pictures the outstanding features of the kingdom of heaven. These parables would speak of the nature and progress of the kingdom. They would mention how the kingdom related to the different classes of people. One of these, the Parable of the Sower (apparently the first one He told) tells about the different responses that various people have to the message of the kingdom. It also speaks of the various issues that they face in life. Two of them - the Parable of the Tares and the Parable of the Net which was cast into the sea - describe the mixture of good and evil that must exist in the kingdom until the end when the great and final separation would take place. Another pair of short parables - those of the Treasure Hid in a Field and of The Precious Pearl - presents the
absolute importance of the kingdom and the importance of gaining citizenship there. Two others - **The Grain of Mustard Seed**, and **The Leaven** hid in three measures of meal - explain how the kingdom advances from small beginnings to a great ending. An eighth parable (found in Mark's Gospel only) teaches that growth in the divine kingdom occurs in stages. A comparison is made to the development of **Grain**: first, the blade, then the ear; then the full ear of corn (Mark 4:26ff).

These parables - at least most of them - were spoken to mixed audiences. It seemed as if they were intended mainly for the ignorant public. Support for this position comes from a reply that Jesus gave to a question the disciples asked. “...His followers, along with the Twelve, began asking Him about the parables. And He was saying to them, “To you has been given the mystery of the kingdom of God; but those who are outside get everything in parables” (Mark 4:10-11). This seems to imply that the Twelve did not need such elementary explanations of truth - mere children's sermons. Jesus only meant that the parables were not as important for them as they were for the public at large. For the Twelve, the parables were only one of several ways that Jesus brought His grace to them. Eventually, they were to become teachers who had been instructed in the things of the kingdom. They would be acquainted with all of its mysteries. They would be able, like a wise homeowner, to display from their treasures both new and old things (Matt. 13:52). On the other hand, the multitudes received the parables which were indispensable to them. These parables gave them their only opportunity to get a little glimpse into the mysteries of the kingdom.

But the Twelve were not **above** the parables. This is evident from the fact that they asked their Master about them in private. And He explained them - probably all of them (Mark 4:34). But the interpretations of only two are preserved for us in the Gospels - the Parables of the Sower and the Tares. The disciples were still only children, and the parables were pretty pictures to them. But they could not tell what the pictures meant. Even after they had received private explanations of their meaning, they were probably not much wiser than before. However, they claimed to be satisfied. Their profession was undoubtedly sincere. They expressed what they felt. But they spoke as children, understood as children, and thought as children. They still had much to learn about these divine mysteries.

After the children had grown to spiritual manhood and fully understood these mysteries, they greatly treasured the happiness they had enjoyed in these earlier years. They had been privileged to hear the parables of Jesus. We have an interesting passage of Scripture that captures the deep impression that these simple pictures produced in the minds of the Apostles. Matthew offers his reflections when he closes his account of Christ's parabolic teaching: “All these things Jesus spoke to the multitudes in parables, and He was not talking to them without a parable, so that what was spoken through the prophet might be fulfilled, saying, ” I will open my mouth in parables; I will utter things hidden since the foundation of
the world” (Matt. 13:34-35). The quotation is taken from Psalm 78, and is significantly different from the original Hebrew and from the Septuagint version (the Greek translation of the Old Testament). Matthew has consciously adapted the words in order to express the absolute originality of the teaching in which he found their fulfillment. While the Psalmist uttered dark sayings from the ancient times of Israel's history, Jesus had spoken things in the parables that had been hidden from the time of creation. This was not an exaggeration on the part of Matthew. The use of the parable as a means of instruction was all but new. And so were the truths expressed in the parables. They were certainly the eternal truths of the divine kingdom, but until the days of Jesus, they had remained unannounced. Earthly things had always been appropriate to symbolize heavenly things. But, until the great Teacher appeared, no one had ever thought of linking the two together so that one would become a mirror of the other and reveal the deep things of God to ordinary eyes - just as no one before Isaac Newton had thought of connecting the fall of an apple with the revolution of the heavenly bodies, even though apples had fallen to the ground from the beginning of creation.

The Philanthropic Work of the Kingdom

What the disciples saw in Christ’s presence was even more wonderful than what they heard. They were eyewitnesses of the events that Jesus told the messengers of John the Baptist to report to him when he was in prison. His works were unquestionable evidence that He was the Christ who would come (Matt. 11:2f). While the disciples watched, blind men received their sight, lame men walked, lepers were cleansed, the deaf recovered their hearing, and dead people were raised to life. For a time, doing these wonderful works was Christ’s daily occupation. He went throughout Galilee and other districts “doing good, and healing all who were oppressed by the devil” (Acts 10:38). The miracles recorded in detail in the Gospels give absolutely no hint of the extent to which these wonderful works were done. The leper was cleansed as Jesus was descending the mountain after the great sermon was preached; the palsied servant of the Roman centurion was restored to health and strength; Peter’s mother-in-law was cured of a fever; demons were cast out of a man in the synagogue in Capernaum; the widow’s son was brought back to life while he was being carried out to be buried. These, and others like them, are only a few samples which have been selected from an innumerable multitude of good works. And it does not matter if they are regarded as miracles or as acts of kindness. The truth of this statement is apparent from paragraphs that frequently occur in the Gospels. They do not report individual miracles, but an indefinite number of them taken as a whole. Here is an example of one of the paragraphs which casually rehearses the works done by Jesus at the close of a busy day: “And when evening had come, after the sun had set, they began bringing to Him all who were ill and those who were demon-possessed. And the whole city had gathered at the door. And He healed many who were ill with various diseases, and cast out many demons” (Mark 1:32-34). All of this happened on a single Sabbath evening in Capernaum shortly after the Sermon on the Mount was preached. Such scenes appear to have been common at this time. We read a little farther on in the same Gospel, “And He told His disciples that a boat should stand ready for Him because of
the multitude, in order that they might not crowd Him; for He had healed many, with the result that all those who had afflictions pressed about Him in order to touch Him” (Mark 3:9-10). On another occasion, Mark reports that “He came home, and the multitude gathered again, to such an extent that they could not even eat a meal” (Mark 3:20).

What is inferred by these passages is the vast extent of Christ’s labors among the suffering. This is supported by the impressions made on the minds of His friends and enemies. Those who were upset by His works were so overwhelmed by what they saw that they found it necessary to develop a theory to account for the mighty influence that Jesus exerted in curing physical and, especially, spiritual problems. They said, “He casts out the demons by the ruler of the demons” (Mark 3:22). It was a lame theory, as Jesus demonstrated. But at least it was conclusive proof that great numbers of demons were cast out.

Those who extolled Jesus’ works had various thoughts. Those which have been recorded support a testimony as to His vast activity and His extraordinary zeal. Some people, apparently relatives, thought He was mad. They believed His enthusiasm had disturbed His mind. So they compassionately tried to save Him from damaging His reputation, which they believed He would do by being overly concerned about doing good works for others (Mark 3:21). The feelings of the people who received the benefits were more devout. “...they were filled with awe, and glorified God, who had given such authority to men” (Matt. 9:8). It was natural for them not to criticize someone who was enthusiastic for humanity, for they were the recipients of His goodness.

The impressions of the Twelve were not recorded as the events took place. But we have an interesting sample of their subsequent reflections as Apostles. The first evangelist appends a statement to his account of the transactions that took place on that Sabbath evening in Capernaum. The devout Matthew, according to his custom, saw Old Testament Scripture fulfilled in these wonderful works. He found the fulfillment of these works in a touching passage from Isaiah: “Surely he took up our infirmities and carried our sorrows” (Is. 53:4). Departing from the Septuagint, Matthew found a suitable way to fulfill his purpose by rendering the text in this way: “HE HIMSELF TOOK OUR INIRMITIES, AND CARRIED AWAY OUR DISEASES” (Matt. 8:17). The Greek translators interpreted the text as referring to people’s spiritual illnesses - their sins. Matthew, however, did not think it was a wrong application of the text nor degrading to the words to find in them a prophecy of the Messiah’s deep sympathy with those who suffered from any disease, whether it was spiritual, mental, or physical. He did not know how to express the intense compassion of his Lord any better than by using prophetic language to represent Him as the One who took their sicknesses on Himself, nor did he misuse the prophet’s thoughts by making this application. He only laid a foundation to infer that if He healed physical diseases, how much more sympathy would the Savior have for the spiritual ones. Surely He who cared for people’s bodies would have even greater sympathy for their souls. It
might be safely anticipated that He who was so conspicuous as a healer of bodily disease would become even more celebrated as a Savior from sin.

The works which the Twelve were privileged to see were certainly worth seeing. And they were most certainly worthy of the Messianic King. They demonstrated that the King and the kingdom were not only coming. It had come. And what could be a better indication of their presence than mercy dropping like the “gentle rain from heaven upon the place beneath”? John the Baptist seems to have thought otherwise when he sent his messengers to inquire of Jesus if He were the Christ who was to come. We can only imagine that he wanted to see a work of judgment on those who remained unrepentant. To him, this would have been a more reliable proof of the Messiah’s coming than these miracles of mercy. The prophetic tendency to complain and the prison air had affected his judgment and his heart. He was in the combative mood of Jonah who was displeased with God, not because He was too stern, but because He was too gracious - too ready to forgive.

The least in the kingdom of heaven were incapable of being offended with these works of our Lord, because they were merciful in nature. The offense in our day can be found elsewhere. People get tripped up over the miraculous things which were seen by the disciples and recorded by the evangelists. They say that mercy is God-like, but miracles are impossible. And they think they are doing well to be skeptical. To be sure, they accept some of the healing miracles because they do not think it is impossible for them to fall within the realm of nature. But they do not believe they belong to the category of the miraculous. “Moral therapeutics” might account for these kinds of miracles, a department of medical science that Mr. Matthew Arnold thinks has not been sufficiently studied yet. All other miracles besides those which are done by moral therapeutics are thought to be unbelievable. But why not extend the dominion of the moral over the physical, and say without qualification, that mercy is God-like, and the kind of works that were done by Jesus were simply matters of course? This is the way it seemed to the Gospel writers. What they marveled at was not the fact that Christ’s miracles were supernatural. Rather, they were amazed at the unfathomable depth of divine compassion. This is what they revealed. There is no trace of their loving the fantastic either in the Gospels or in the Epistles.

The disciples may have felt this way when the age of wonders first happened before their astonished eyes. But they had lost it all by the time the New Testament books began to be written. Throughout the New Testament, miracles are spoken of in a sober, almost matter-of-fact, tone. How is this to be explained? The explanation is that the Apostles had seen so many miracles while they were with Jesus that they were no longer excited about them. Their sense of wonder had been diminished because they were saturated with them. But though they stopped being amazed at the power of their Lord, they never ceased to wonder at His grace. The love of Christ remained for them throughout life a thing that surpassed knowledge. The longer they lived, the more they acknowledged the truth of their Master’s words, “Blessed are the eyes which see the things you see” (Luke 10:23).