

## **WITH DEEDS OF LOVE THE HEAVENLY KINGDOM COMES**

Shortly after I entered the ministry I paid a visit to a couple who had visited our church a few times.

In the course of our conversation I asked them where they had been worshipping before they visited us.

The man told me that they had been going back and forth between two local churches which were very different from each other.

When I asked him to describe the difference, he said that if he had to describe the first church with one word, that word would be “doctrine.”

If he had to describe the second with one word, that word would be “love.”

I remember wondering at the time how the people at the church I was serving would describe our church if they had to pick one of those two words.

I hoped that the word they would pick would be “love.”

Now don't take this to mean that I think doctrine is unimportant.

Doctrine is vitally important.

The doctrines that a church teaches are very important because over time they will determine the form and substance of the members' faith.

For example, consider the following two quotes from the Bible:

*"The law was given so that sin would increase."*

*"I am the way, the truth and the life; no one comes to the Father except through me."*

These are two clear and unambiguous doctrines that determine how a person understands his salvation.

Still, if doctrines are the sail and rudder of the ship and determine where the ship will go, love is the water that holds the ship afloat and keeps it from sinking.

Jesus said, *"Love the Lord your God with all your heart and soul and mind and strength,"* and *"Love your neighbor as yourself."*

The last command he gave to his disciples before he was crucified was, *"Love each other as I have loved you."*

Paul wrote, *"Faith, hope and love: these three abide and the greatest of these is love."*

Love is a precious gift that God wants to give to every single human being and he wants those who receive his love to share it with others.

One of the leaders of the early labor movement in the United States was a man by the name of Samuel Gompers.

Gompers was a cigar maker who founded the American Federation of Labor in 1886 and became its first president.

He was short, tough and gruff and a man of few words.

Once, after a particularly bitter and lengthy strike, a journalist asked Gompers: *“What is it that the working man really wants?”*

Gompers took the cigar out of his mouth and said, *“More.”*

And that’s pretty much how it is with our lives in this world.

I think we can safely say that the desire for “more” is not limited to the working man but applies to all of us.

When we seek our happiness in the kingdom of this world (and we do all the time) we look for it in terms of

what this world has to offer: clothes, property, gadgets, money.

And we always would like to have prettier clothes, more expensive houses, fancier gadgets, more money.

I've seen a bumper that says: *"He who dies with the most toys, wins."*

But I've seen another one that reads: *"He who dies with the most toys is still dead."*

The man who seeks his happiness by getting "more" has enslaved himself to an insatiable idol.

He will never have enough because that is the very nature of "more."

The kingdom of this world is a zero-sum economy where people struggle to take from others so that they can have more for themselves.

There's a song about the almighty dollar that goes something like, "Those who have it don't need it and those who need it don't have it."

But the man who seeks his happiness in the Kingdom of God operates according to a different economy—not man's economy where the rules are simply to strive for a bigger piece of the pie, but God's

economy, which is an economy of boundless fertility and growth.

We have a beautiful description of God's economy in the *Book of Isaiah*.

Listen to God's words, as he speaks through the prophet: *"As the rain and the snow come down from heaven, and do not return to it without watering the earth and making it bud and flourish, so that it yields seed for the sower and bread for the eater, so is my word that goes out from my mouth: it will not return to me empty but will accomplish what I desire and achieve the purpose for which I sent it. You will go out in joy and be led forth in peace; the mountains and hills will burst into song before you...."*

God's economy is not an economy of finite resources where people try to grab more for themselves by taking away from someone else; but an economy of infinite resources and unlimited growth where people are focused on *giving* rather than *getting*.

**GOD WANTS TO TURN US INTO GIVERS INSTEAD OF TAKERS!**

And what God wants us to be He will give us the power to be.

If we ask Him he will create in us the desire to use our time and talents and money and energy to *love* each

other into the Kingdom of God rather than strive for more for ourselves.

And there is no more important work than we can do.

To demonstrate the power of love see if you can answer the following five questions:

*“What are the names of the five richest people in the world?”*

*What are the names of the last five Heisman trophy winners?*

*What are the names of the last five Nobel Prize winners?*

*What are the names of the last five Miss Americas?*

*What are the names of the last five Pulitzer Prize winners?”*

How are you doing so far?

Now ask yourself this: *What is the name of your favorite grade-school teacher?*

*“What is the name of a Sunday School teacher who taught you about Jesus?”*

*What is the name of a friend who helped you during a hard time?*

*What is the name of someone who visited you when you were in the hospital?*

I'll bet you don't have much trouble remembering those names.

The point is clear: after the trophies are put on the shelf the names of the winners tend to fade from memory.

But the names of people who showed us love live on in our hearts and memories.

Love is patient, love is kind. It does not envy, it does not boast, it is not proud. Love is not rude, it is not self-seeking, it is not easily angered, it keeps no record of wrongs. Love does not delight in evil but rejoices with the truth. It always protects, always trusts, always hopes always perseveres.

Love never fails.

This is what the Kingdom of God is all about: receiving the gift of God's love through faith in Jesus Christ and sharing that gift with other people—knowing that as we share it we will receive more and more to share.

We can easily absorb ourselves with the passing pleasures this world has to offer, but sooner or later we will find that those pleasures just breed a desire for more of the same because the kingdom of this world is enslaved to the law of MORE.

Or, we can seek Kingdom treasures that have value before God and enrich the lives of our fellow human beings: treasures of giving rather than of taking.

Those are treasures that last into eternity.

*Our Savior said: "Do not store up for yourselves treasures on earth, where moth and rust destroy, and where thieves break in and steal. But store up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where moth and rust do not destroy, and where thieves do not break in and steal. For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also."*

I hope that you and I have the wisdom to invest our time and talents and money and energy in treasures that have eternal value.

Amen



