

THE KINGDOM OF GOD IS NOT FOR GLUTTONS!

Today's Text: Romans 14: 14- 23

Extracts:

Yet if your brother is grieved because of your food, you are no longer walking in love. Do not destroy with your food the one for whom Christ died... for *the kingdom of God is not eating and drinking, but righteousness and peace and joy in the Holy Spirit*. For he who serves Christ in these things is acceptable to God and approved by men.... *Do not destroy the work of God for the sake of food*. All things indeed are pure, but it is evil for the man who eats with offense [Rom. 14: 15-20]

In 2007, the Guinness World Records accepted that the ghost chilli was the world's spiciest at more than one million Scoville Heat Units (SHU), the measure of spiciness.¹ The hottest chilli is (in 2011) the Trinidad Scorpion "butch T" which was grown by the Chilli Factory (Australia) and rated at 1.46 million SHUs. Some people have tried to enter the Guinness World Records by eating such hot stuff. For example, in 2002, Anita Crafford (South Africa) ate eight jalapenos in one minute.² But on 9 April 2009, that record was challenged by a 26 year-old Indian mother, Anandita Dutta Tamuly, who ate 51 red hot chillies in two minutes! In reacting to her feat, Anandita said, "I felt so terrible I could eat only 51. In 2006, I had eaten 60 of them in two minutes for a local record event. But I am sure I shall make it to the Guinness World Records."

Can you imagine what human beings would eat or drink just to set or break "worthless" human records? Yet, such feats avail nothing when it comes to matters of the kingdom of God. The word of God says, "Seek first the kingdom of God and His righteousness, and all these things shall be added to you" [Matt. 6: 33]. But what is the kingdom of God? Is it different from the kingdom of heaven? In this week's Bible verses, Paul reminds us that the kingdom of God is not about eating and drinking, but righteousness and peace and joy in the Holy Spirit. What does that mean? Certainly, the kingdom of God is not for food and drink lovers; it is not for gluttons! So, who is welcomed to get into it? Let us find out from this week's study.

¹ http://news.bbc.co.uk/go/pr/fr/-/2/hi/south_asia/7993925.stm

² "Anandita Dutta Tamuly," From Wikipedia, the free encyclopedia; http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Anandita_Dutta_Tamuly and Guinness Record for eating world's hottest Chilli: Ghost Chilli | NowPublic News Coverage <http://www.nowpublic.com/strange/guinness-record-eating-worlds-hottest-chilli-ghost-chilli#ixzz2T6YTF3v6>

1. Background: The Kingdom of God at a glance

When Jesus began His public ministry, soon after He had been tempted by the devil, He came to Capernaum by the Sea of Galilee and preached, saying, “Repent, for the *kingdom of heaven* is at hand” [Matt. 4: 12-17]. That is the gospel of Matthew’s report. In the version of the same story by Luke, Jesus added, “I must preach the *kingdom of God* to the other cities also, because for this purpose I have been sent” [Lk 4: 43]. Is the kingdom of heaven then synonymous with the kingdom of God? Let us probe more deeply into the matter.

Taken together, the four gospels [Matthew, Mark, Luke and John] present a total picture of the person of Jesus Christ. However, each of them paid attention to different aspects of Him. For example, Matthew looked at Jesus the King while Mark painted the picture of Jesus the Servant. For Luke, Jesus the Son of Man rang through while John looked at Jesus the Son of God. These four “faces” are well captured in the four living creatures around the throne of God in heaven. One of the living creatures had the face of a lion [symbolic of a king], the second, the face of a calf [symbolic of the servant], the third, the face of a man [humanity] and the fourth, the face of a flying eagle [symbolic of Deity] [Ezek. 1:1-10; Rev.4; 6-7]. Therefore, the four living creatures in heaven are represented by the living word of God (four gospels) on earth.

A kingdom is associated with a king. So, Matthew’s Gospel may give us a clearer understanding of the differences, if any, between the kingdom of God and the kingdom of heaven. At the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus taught His listeners how to pray, that we now call the Lord’s Prayer. That prayer begins as follows, “*Our Father in heaven*, hallowed be Your name. *Your will be done on earth as it is in heaven*” [Matt. 6: 9-10]. From that prayer, we can see God’s sovereign rule as follows:

a) *By territory*

God’s throne is in heaven [Is. 66:1] as is confirmed by the Lord’s Prayer quoted above. In that sense, we can talk of *the kingdom of heaven as the place where God’s throne is and to which the faithful aspire to enter after physical death*. Christ’s promise for those who are “poor in spirit” or persecuted is the kingdom of heaven [Matt. 5: 3-12].

b) *By power*

If the earth is God’s footstool, it suggests that His sovereignty extends beyond heaven. The Psalmist says, “The LORD has established His throne in heaven, and His kingdom rules over all” [Ps. 103: 19]. *God’s sovereignty is over all His creations in heaven, on earth and beneath the earth, past, present and the*

future. In this sense, we can talk of the kingdom of God in terms of power, and the kingdom of heaven can be seen as a part of the kingdom of God. When His will is done on earth as it is in heaven, such as during Christ's millennial reign on earth [**Rev. 20: 1-6**], then there is no longer any territorial distinction between the kingdom of God and the kingdom of heaven. For example, a country's embassy abroad is an integral part of that country's territory. To be admitted into that country as a visitor or resident, you must first visit its embassy and obtain an entry visa. Once you have been granted an entry permit, you are confident that you will be admitted into that country even though you have not yet bought a travel ticket!

When the Pharisees asked Jesus when the kingdom of God would come, He replied, "The kingdom of God does not come with observation; nor will they say, 'See here!' or 'See there!' For indeed, the kingdom of God is within you" [**Lk 17: 20-21**]. From our analysis above, we can see the clear relationship between the kingdom of God and the kingdom of heaven. The kingdom of heaven is the believers' ultimate home and they are for the meantime the ambassadors for Christ on earth [**2 Cor. 5: 20**]. Therefore, *if you want to get into the kingdom of heaven when you die, you must first get into the kingdom of God while still alive*. However, just as you must meet some entry requirements to get another country's visa, you must also satisfy some requirements to enter into the kingdom of heaven. The requirements are spiritual, not ephemeral, such as food and drinks. That is what Paul is drawing our attention to in this week's study. So, how can we get into such required spiritual groove?

2. How to obtain the visa to the Kingdom

After Jesus had fed five thousand people with a few loaves of bread and some fish, food lovers began to run after Him. Some even took boats to cross the Sea of Galilee, seeking Jesus for more bread! When they finally found Him on the other side of the sea, Jesus said to them, "You seek Me, not because you saw the signs, but because you ate of the loaves and were filled. Do not labour for the food which perishes, but for the food which endures to everlasting life, which the Son of Man will give you, because God the Father has set His seal on Him" [**Jn 6: 22-27**].

In the Bible verses we are studying, Paul warned believers, "The kingdom of God is not eating and drinking, but *righteousness and peace and joy in the Holy Spirit*" [**Rom. 14: 17**]. Righteousness, peace and joy are manifestations of the fruit of the Holy Spirit [**Gal. 5: 22**]. Therefore, by identifying what can produce them, we can have a good hold on how to obtain the visa to heaven through the kingdom of God. Here are some key variables (among so many others):

c) *You must believe in the Holy Spirit*

A good number of believers who have received water baptism still do not have a clue about who the Holy Spirit is and what role He plays for believers. For example, at Ephesus, Paul came across twelve disciples who had received baptism under John the Baptist's ministry. He asked them, "Did you receive the Holy Spirit when you believed?" They replied, "We have not so much as heard whether there is a Holy Spirit." After they had been baptized in the name of Jesus, Paul laid hands on them and "the Holy Spirit came upon them and they spoke with tongues and prophesied" [Acts 19: 1-7].

Some believers today who claim to have received water baptism merely see the Holy Spirit as a ghost who happens to be holy! But if the Holy Spirit is that member of the triune God that you cannot afford to offend without risking hell fire [Matt. 12: 31-32], do you not think He is someone you must get intimately acquainted with? Here are a few facts you need to know about Him:

- No one can say that Jesus is Lord except by the Holy Spirit [1 Cor. 12: 3]. Therefore, *those who do not believe in the Holy Spirit are not likely to also believe that Jesus is the Son of God.*
- Only those who are born of water and the Spirit can enter the kingdom of God [Jn 3: 5].
- Only those who are led by the Spirit of God are the sons of God, with the right to call Him Father and to become joint-heirs with Christ [Rom. 8: 14-17].

In effect, *the Holy Spirit is God's Internet Provider for believers.* He gives them eyes to see into the unknown or inscrutable future, which in turn gives them the confidence and boldness to face persecution and uncertainty. For example, as Stephen was being stoned to death, he looked up and "being full of the Holy Spirit, gazed into heaven and saw the glory of God, and Jesus standing at the right hand of God." With such assurance that the kingdom of heaven was within his view, "he knelt down and cried out with a loud voice, 'Lord, do not charge them [his killers] with this sin.' And when he had said this, he fell asleep [died]" [Acts 7: 54-60].

So, examine your relationship with the Holy Spirit. The greatest sin against Him is lying. For example, when Ananias lied that he gave to the church all that he had realized from selling his land, whereas he had kept part of it for himself, Peter said to him, "Why has Satan filled your heart to lie to the Holy Spirit and keep back part of the price of the land for yourself?" Ananias died soon after

[**Acts 5: 1-5**]. We lie to the Holy Spirit when we claim to base our actions or decisions on His directive when in fact He has not spoken to us. So be careful what you say to your congregation when all you are trying to do is to put some legitimacy on your wayward conduct in the house of God. Without the Holy Spirit, you cannot enter the kingdom of God.

b) *You must walk by faith, not by sight*

Paul writes, “Whatever is not from faith is sin” [**Rom. 14: 23**]. Faith has been defined as the “substance of things hoped for, the evidence of things not seen” [**Heb. 11: 1**]. It means acting on the advance warning or command of God through the Holy Spirit. Therefore, *faith is a fact known in advance*.

Take Paul’s experience when the ship conveying him as a prisoner to Rome ran into a storm and was almost sunk. There were two hundred and seventy-six persons on board that ship and all hope that they would be saved was finally given up. That was when the man of faith went to work. He came into their midst and urged them to take heart “for there will be no loss of life among [them], but only the ship.” What gave him such confidence? It came from on high “for there stood by [him that] night an angel of the God to whom [he belonged] and whom [he served], saying, ‘Do not be afraid, Paul; you must be brought before Caesar; and indeed God has granted you all those who sail with you.’” In the end, every one of them was saved while the ship broke into fragments [**Acts 27: 14-44**].

Here is what faith can do for you:

- ***Without faith, no one can please God*** for those who come to Him must believe that He is and He is a rewarder of those who diligently seek Him [**Heb. 11: 6**];
- ***God measures righteousness by faith***, for Abraham “believed in the LORD, and He accounted it to him for righteousness” [**Gen. 15: 1-6**];
- ***Faith gives you access to grace on which you can stand*** to rejoice in hope, glory in tribulations that in turn produces perseverance and character. Hope based on faith cannot disappoint because the love of God has been poured out in your heart by the Holy Spirit given to you [**Rom. 5: 1-5**].
- ***Faith enables you to eat and drink without making others stumble, offended or weak*** [**Rom. 14: 20-21**].

When you have righteousness, joy and peace in the Holy Spirit, you are already in the kingdom of God. When you are in the kingdom of God, you know that the kingdom of heaven is in your view. Everything else, such as what, when or how you eat or drink, what earthly things you pursue or love, will be largely secondary or irrelevant. That summarises Paul's message in this week's study.

3. Conclusion: Watch your appetite!

Jesus said to the Samaritan woman by the well in Sychar, "Whoever drinks of the water that I shall give him will never thirst. But the water that I shall give him will become in him a fountain of water springing up into everlasting life" [Jn 4: 14]. When His disciples came back and urged Him to eat, He told them, "I have food to eat of which you do not know. As they wondered if somebody had brought Him food to eat in their absence, He said to them, "My food is to do the will of Him who sent Me, and to finish His work" [vv. 31-34].

There is nothing wrong with eating or drinking as long as you do not do it to excess or give it top priority over matters of your salvation. The kingdom of God is not for gluttons. It is for those seeking righteousness, joy and peace in the Holy Spirit.