

TERMS OF ENTRANCE

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It indeed is a great privilege that we all have to be assembled here today. I think we should all consider ourselves a people blessed at we can gather together as we have the past services to study such a theme as we have under consideration and that we can have fellowship together as brethren in Christ.

I think if we could go back for a time this morning to ancient Israel to the time that Jesus and his disciples were walking here upon the earth, that we could imagine the excitement and anticipation among the Israelites as they began, first, to hear John the Baptist talked about the kingdom being near at hand and then to hear Jesus and his disciples preach the same message. Daniel and Isaiah and any of their prophets had prophesied now for several hundred years concerning the establishment of a kingdom. The Jews at this time were a very oppressed people under the Roman rule. They were fixed a very heavy tax burden and they were looking for a way to escape; a way to get out from under this burden. As they began to hear John, who they considered to be a prophet, and then to hear Jesus and his disciples who taught that the kingdom was near at hand and they began to seek out and to find more information concerning the kingdom. They wanted to know how they might be a part of this kingdom and how they themselves could be accepted by us kingdom of God that was near at hand.

We're thankful today that we have a record in the scriptures of one, a notable Jew, who seemingly was concerned with the question of how he could be a part of this kingdom. We have the answer that Jesus gave this man. It was not necessarily the answer that Nicodemus expected or wanted to hear. The Jews were looking for an earthly kingdom, certainly the kingdom of God was not to be an earthly kingdom, but rather a spiritual kingdom and so the answer at first startled Nicodemus. He was not startled at the fact that there would be some requirements that he would have to meet because I'm sure, in that day, just as it is today for one to become a member of any organization certain requirements had to be met. It doesn't really matter what organization that we might want to attach ourselves to there are some requirements that first we have to meet in order to be a part of that organization. I'm sure Nicodemus realized that there must be some requirements or rules that he would have to adhere to and accept if he was going to be a part of that kingdom. What surprised Nicodemus was the manner of entrance into the kingdom or into the Church. It seems as though Jesus anticipated his question of how that one might enter this kingdom and Jesus said as is recorded by John in the third chapter verse three, "Verily, verily I say unto thee that except a man be born again he cannot see the kingdom of God. That which is born of the flesh is flesh; and that which is born of the Spirit is spirit" (John 3:5-6).

Nicodemus did not understand what Jesus was saying. Today, there are many people that fail to understand what Jesus was teaching Nicodemus here. There are still many people today that are very confused about the birth, the being born again into the Kingdom of God.

I am thankful that we have the words of Jesus as he prepares to leave this earth to ascend back to the Father. He had assembled with his disciples and was giving them charge of what he expected them to do while he was away. Recorded in Mark 16:15-16 are Jesus' words to them, "Go ye into all the world, and preach the gospel to every creature. He that believeth and is baptized shall be saved; but he that believeth not shall be damned." I believe Jesus had the very same thought in mind when he told Nicodemus that he would have to be born of water and the spirit. The same thought is revealed here in Mark 16 when He says, "... he that believeth and is baptized shall be saved.. "

Jesus told His disciples to preach that people should believe and be baptized in order to be saved. Some may say this does not necessarily put one into the Kingdom or into the Church. The Scripture says in Acts 2:47, "... And the Lord added to the church daily such as should be saved." We were added to the Church? The saved. Who were added to the Kingdom? They that were saved. Jesus told Nicodemus that he must be born of water and of the spirit to enter into the Kingdom. He told His disciples to teach the people that if they would believe and be baptized they would be

saved. Upon obeying this they would be a part of the Kingdom or of the Church. Belief and baptism puts one into the Church or the Kingdom of Jesus Christ.

The first requirement or term of entrance into this Kingdom is faith. It is belief. The Apostle in Hebrews 11:6 says, "But without faith it is impossible to please him: for he that cometh to God must believe that he is, and that he is a rewarder of them that diligently seek him." One that would come to Jesus Christ must first believe that He is, that He is the Messiah, that He is the Son of God. In Matthew 16:18 we have the words of Jesus when He said, "... upon this rock I will build my Church ..." What rock? The statement that Peter made, "... Thou art the Christ, the Son of the living God." The very basis, the very foundation of the Kingdom is that Jesus Christ is the Son of God. The very first requirement, the first term of entrance into this Kingdom is that one must believe with strong conviction that Jesus Christ is the Son of God, that He is the Messiah. Not only must we believe this but we also must believe as strongly that he will reward those that will diligently follow after Him and become His disciples. Jesus said in John 8:24, "I said therefore unto you, that ye shall die in your sins: for if ye believe not that I am He, ye shall die in your sins." This belief then is the very foundation of our Christian heritage.

I think it is interesting to note that Jesus in giving this commission in Mark chapter 16, told His disciples to go preach the gospel. Before one can have this faith; before one can believe in Jesus Christ as the Son of God, he must first be taught. He must hear. In Romans 10:17 Paul said, "So then faith cometh by hearing, and hearing by the word of God." How do we obtain our faith? By hearing the word of God.

The next requirement or term of entrance for one to enter into the Kingdom is a changed life, a changed will, a changed mind. We, at one time, did not recognize Jesus Christ as the Messiah but now having been taught we accept Him. We have a strong faith. What does this cause us to do? It causes us to begin changes in our lives. We begin changing our will, changing our mind and changing our life. This is what we call repentance. It is called repentance in the Scriptures. Jesus says in Luke 13:3, "I tell you, Nay: but, except ye repent, ye shall all likewise perish." In Acts 17:30, the Apostle Paul in talking to the ancient Grecian people in Athens said, "And the times of this ignorance God winked at..." What ignorance? They had every type of idol there was, even to one who might be unknown to them. "And the times of this ignorance God winked at; but now commandeth all men everywhere to repent:"

It is necessary for man to repent to have this change of will, this change of life, this change of mind. We find again upon the birth of the Church, when the Kingdom was established, when the people there wanted to know what to do to be saved, Peter told them. He said, "... Repent, and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ... (Acts 2:38)" And so repentance, a change of life, is a requirement or term of entrance into the Kingdom of God.

The next requirement is telling or confessing the basis of our faith. What is the very foundation, the very basis of our faith that causes us to live as a Christian? It is the fact that Jesus Christ is the Son of God. You know the Kingdom is not something that we should enter quietly. It is something we must tell others about. We can't be a Christian and keep it to ourselves. We have to talk about it, tell others about it. So a term of entrance into the Kingdom is the fact that we are willing to tell others or confess to others that Jesus is the Christ. The Apostle Paul writing to the Church in Rome said, "That if thou shalt confess with thy mouth the Lord Jesus, and shalt believe in thine heart that God hath raised him from the dead, thou shalt be saved. For with the heart man believeth unto righteousness; and with the mouth confession is made unto salvation" (Rom. 10:9-10).

The Ethiopian nobleman, after Phillip had preached Jesus to him, saw some water and ask, ". . . what doth hinder me to be baptized? And Phillip said, If thou believest with all thine heart, thou mayest. And he answered and said, I believe that Jesus Christ is the Son of God" (Acts 8:36-37) What did he believe? What did he confess? "... I believe that Jesus Christ is the Son of God." This is the confession that Peter made that the Church is founded upon. This is the confession that we must make if we are to become a part of that Kingdom. This is a fact we must accept and live by. We must confess before others with our mouths unto salvation.

The final step that puts one into the Kingdom or completes this birth is the act of baptism. The Apostle Peter in I Peter 3:21 says, "The like figure whereunto even baptism doth also now save us (not the putting -away of the filth of the flesh, but the answer of a good conscience, toward God,) by

the resurrection of Jesus Christ." We've already noticed that the Lord added to the church daily such as should be saved. It is the saved that are added to the church. It is becoming in a saved state that allows us to become a member or a part of the Church or the Kingdom. The Apostle Peter says, ". . . even baptism doth also save us . . ." or put us into this saved state that allows us to be added to the Church or the Kingdom of Jesus Christ.

The Apostle Paul, in writing to the church in Galatia, says, "For ye are all the children of God by faith in Christ Jesus. For as many of you as have been baptized into Christ have put on Christ" (Gal. 3:26-27). Now how does one get into Christ? By baptism. This is the culminating act that puts us into the Kingdom or into the body of Christ.

The Apostle Paul in writing to the church in Rome says, "But God be thanked, that ye were the servants of sin, but ye have obeyed from the heart that form of doctrine which was delivered you" (Rom. 6:17). At one time these Christians at Rome had been in sin but they had obeyed from the heart that form of doctrine. What was the form of doctrine that they had obeyed? In verses three through six Paul says, "Know ye not, that so many of us as were baptized into Jesus Christ were baptized into his death? Therefore we are buried with him by baptism into death: that like as Christ was raised up from the dead by the glory of the Father, even so we also should walk in newness of life. For if we have been planted together in the likeness of his death, we shall be also in the likeness of his resurrection: Knowing this, that our old man is crucified with him, that the body of sin might be destroyed, that henceforth we should not serve sin." What is that form of doctrine? The gospel that they had obeyed Paul tells the church at Corinth was the death, burial and resurrection. We, too, die to sin. We, too, rise to walk a new life. Why? Because we are in the Kingdom. We are in the Church. We are in a saved state. We are justified in the sight of God.

This completes the birth that makes a person a subject of the Kingdom of Heaven, the Kingdom of God or the Church. Is this then the plan that was put into operation by the apostles in the early church? Is this the plan that was put into operation on the day of Pentecost, the very birth of the Church? We find that these people had assembled together and the Apostle Peter, the spokesman upon that occasion because the keys had been given to him, arose and preached. He convicted those people that this Jesus, who had been among them and had walked among them, was the Christ. He was the Son of God. He was who He was. They cried out and wanted to know what to do to be saved. What did Peter tell them? He said, ". . . Repent and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of sins . . ." Was this what Jesus had told them to do? Certainly it was. This was what Jesus had told Nicodemus. These people had already believed, they were pricked in their hearts They had already accepted that Jesus Christ was the Son of God and so Peter instructed them to repent to be baptized.

What about Samaria? Phillip went up to that region and began to preach the gospel to those people. In Acts 8:12 the Bible says, "But when they believed Phillip preaching the things concerning the kingdom of God, and the name of Jesus Christ, they were baptized, both men and women." They believed Phillip's teaching and they were baptized.

Remember again the Ethiopian nobleman. Here was a man that was a very conscientious man. He traveled long and hard miles to go to the city of Jerusalem to worship God in the way he thought God should be worshiped. On his way home there was a preacher, an evangelist of the gospel who attached himself to his chariot and preached to him Jesus. At the conclusion of this he wanted to know why that he could not be baptized. Phillip said, "... if thou believest with all thine heart, thou mayest..." and he made that great confession. They stopped that chariot right there and they went down into the water and Phillip baptized him and he went on his way rejoicing. Was this not what Jesus told Nicodemus? Was this not what Jesus told his disciples? This is how one will become a member of the Kingdom.

Cornelius is the first Gentile convert that we have record of in the Scriptures. He and his house were to hear the gospel. They sent for Peter and Peter preached to them. What did he preach? He preached Jesus Christ, His life, death, burial and resurrection. The Scripture says, "And he commanded them to be baptized in the name of the Lord..." (Acts 11:48). They believed this preaching of Peter when Peter commanded them to be baptized.

I believe it is summed up quite well in Acts 18:8 concerning the conversion of the people in Corinth, "... and many of the Corinthians hearing believed, and were baptized." Thus they

became the Church of God at Corinth.

Jesus told Nicodemus at the very beginning of His personal ministry, "... Ye must be born again." At the close of His ministry as He prepared to go back to Heaven, He told His disciples that they must preach and teach people that they should believe and be baptized.

The Apostle Peter says in I Peter 1:23, "Being born again, not of corruptible seed, but of incorruptible, by the word of God, which liveth and abideth for ever."

How does one enter into the Kingdom of God? How does one enter into the Church? He enters into the Church by a birth. This birth is hearing the gospel of Jesus Christ. It is believing this gospel: believing that Jesus is the Messiah, the Son of God. It is a change of life, a change of mind: it is repentance. It is being willing to confess the faith we have in Him as the Son of God. It is being willing to submit to baptism, wherein we contact His blood, His saving blood. This puts us in a saved state, in a justified state. The saved, the scriptures teach us, are added to the Kingdom. We are added to the Church and so the way, the terms of entrance, into the Church is a simple plan. It is a plan that people today, generally speaking, in the religious world tend to overlook and ignore. It is a simple plan of faith and obedience to Jesus Christ culminating in a burial in water. This completes the birth, the new birth into Jesus Christ.