

INTRODUCTION

Let's open our Bibles to Romans 14:17. We'll read exactly what we just sang about there. You have to be careful what you read to make sure you figure it out. Some of you have already read some of these things called "actual bloopers from church bulletins." One of them said, "Ladies, the church rummage sale is a chance for you to get rid of those things not worth keeping around the house. Don't forget to bring your husbands." Another one said, "Barbara is in the hospital and needs blood donors for more transfusions. She is also having trouble sleeping and requests tapes of the pastor's sermons. I don't think that's funny myself, actually." Another one said, "The ladies of the church have cast off clothing of every kind, and they may be seen in the church basement on Friday. Eight new choir robes are needed, due to the addition of several new choir members and to the deterioration of some older ones." The final one, this actually appeared in a church bulletin, "An African missionary, Bertha Belch, will be speaking tonight at Calvary Memorial Church. Come tonight and hear Bertha Belch all the way from Africa." Now, that would be something, wouldn't it? That's great. When you folks send me funnier things, I'll share funnier things, all right?

When you read something, you have to really pay attention and say, "Did I really read what I read?" When you come to Romans 14:17, I call it the New Testament condensed version of the gospel. A few years ago, *Reader's Digest* decided they would publish the "Reader's Digest Condensed Version of the Bible." They were going to take some parts out and condense it down. It was a marketing flop. Do you know why? Because you really can't take anything away from the Bible. Every single word in the Bible is inspired of God and it's irreplaceable. There is nothing you can take out. In fact, sometimes you'll want to look at the very last page of your Bible in Revelations 22, there is a warning saying, "If anybody takes away from the words of this prophecy, your name will be taken away out of the book of life." If anybody adds to the words of this prophecy, these plagues will be added unto you.

Every word in the Bible is important. So you can't condense the Bible down, but what I'm talking about to today is you condense the essence of the gospel, the kingdom of God down into one verse, like John 3:16, like Romans 6:23. Romans 14:17 falls in that category. This is why I memorized this verse in college. This is why I've been having a good time being a Christian since I was in college. It says, "For the kingdom of God is not a matter of eating or drinking, but of righteousness, peace and joy in the Holy Spirit."

That phrase "in the Holy Spirit" covers all three of those, righteousness in the Holy Spirit, peace in the Holy Spirit, and joy in the Holy Spirit. When you understand that, my friend, look at verse 18. Anyone who serves Christ in this way is pleasing to God—that's your vertical relationship—and is approved by men. That's your horizontal relationship. That is the condensed essence of the gospel of the kingdom of God.

I. THE KINGDOM OF GOD EXPLAINED

Let's talk about that today. I want to say two things about this kingdom of God. Don't you want to be a part of it? Number one is the kingdom of God explained. This verse explains what the kingdom of God is. It starts by telling us what the kingdom of God is not.

1. The kingdom of God is NOT a list of external rules (religion)

It's not a list of external rules. You know, that's what religion is. Religion is man's effort to try to become acceptable to God by the way they act, by keeping a list of thou "shalt do this" or "thou shalt not do this." You remember the context of this passage? If you've been here the last couple of weeks I've been talking about Romans 14, it discusses all these disputable matters, these questionable issues that some Christians say are okay and some Christians say are not. The essence of the Christian life is not about arguing about those things. It's not keeping a list. It is in knowing Jesus Christ.

I look around and see some people into religion whether it's the Catholic religion or the Baptist religion or the Methodist religion. Can I say very clearly, there are not going to be any Catholics in heaven, and there are not going to be any Baptists in heaven? There aren't going to be any Presbyterians in heaven. The only people who are going to be in heaven are those who are born again, who have a relationship with Jesus Christ.

Now, maybe you've heard this story. I told it a couple of years ago. There was this preacher really strict on being a Baptist. He was at a meeting like this. He said, "Everybody who's glad to be a Baptist, say 'amen.'" Most everybody said amen. He said, "Anybody in this crowd not happy to be a Baptist?" A little kid on the back said, "amen." Preacher didn't like it. He said, "Son, what are you back there?" He said, "Sir, I'm a Methodist." That preacher didn't like that, so he thought he would embarrass that little boy. He said, "Tell us, everybody in this room, you tell us why are you a Methodist?" The little kid said, "Well, sir, I'm a Methodist because my mama and daddy are Methodists." The preacher knew he had him then. He said, "Son, tell everybody in this room: If your mama and daddy had been idiots, what would you be?" He said, "I guess I would be a Baptist."

It is not Baptism, it is not Methodism, and it is not Catholicism: Religion won't get you into heaven. There's a preacher named David Hoke, who said something really good about religion and a relationship. You've heard me preach it so many times. Listen to the way he puts it. He writes:

"Religion produces churches full of hypocrites who feel the need to put on a front so that people will not know the real struggles they're enduring. Instead of setting us free to serve the Lord, religion puts us into bondage. It fills us with guilt and finally with futility, because deep down inside, we know we can never measure up to God's rules.

Christianity, on the other hand, is not a religion at all. It is a relationship between a person and the living God of the universe. Instead of being an attempt instigated by man to reach God [that's religion], it is the grace of God attempting to reach man. What we see is not a man ascending the loftiest peaks of a majestic mountain to meditate as he sits close to God [that's religion], but the Son of God leaving his majestic throne of glory to come down and to be made into a man. We do not have to ascend to God, for He has already descended to us in Jesus."

Do you see the difference between religion and a relationship with God? And religion is keeping a bunch of lists. The Bible says the kingdom of God is not eating and drinking. It's not keeping these rules.

2. The kingdom of God is a life in subjection to the Ruler (relationship)

A life lived in obedience and subjection to the ruler. Who is the Ruler, capital 'r'? It's Jesus. He's the king, he's the ruler; He's the Lord. My life verse is Matthew 6:33. If you don't have a life verse, you can have that one. It says, "Seek first the kingdom of God and his righteousness, and all these things shall be added unto you." In 1970, that became the guiding verse of my life. I said, I'm going to seek God and I'm going to seek his kingdom first before anything else in life. That says that the number one priority of a person ought to be seeking God's kingdom. You say, "Okay, that sounds good to me. What is God's kingdom?" Well, this verse tells us what it is. It is righteousness, peace and joy in the Holy Spirit. I've got to explain those.

This life lived in relationship with Jesus involves both a change in character and a change in conduct.

a. FIRST your character is changed then

b. THEN you change your conduct

Now that's what the Christian life is. First your character is changed on the inside, and then you, through the power of the Spirit, start changing your conduct.

Now don't get those backwards. Religion changes it. Religion says, "Change the way you act first, and then you'll be acceptable to God." No, Christianity says, "You come to God as a sinner, admit that you're a sinner, repent of your sin, and then He starts changing you from the inside out." Religion starts on the outside and works in. Christianity starts on the inside and works out.

Now, once there was a very religious man named Nicodemus. He came to see Jesus one night. That was the first case of "Nick at Night." You've heard me say that before. Nicodemus came to see Jesus at night. He said, "What are you teaching about?" And this was a religious man, more religious than any of us in this room. He had the Old Testament, the Pentateuch memorized. He tried to keep it. He fasted three times every week. He gave alms to the poor. He did all these kind of religious acts. And Jesus looked at this religious man, and this is what he said in John 3:3. He said, "Nicodemus, unless you are born again, you won't even see the kingdom of God."

Do you know why some people, perhaps in this room or watching on television, can't really see the kingdom of God? Because religion has blinded your eyes to it. You still think the kingdom of God has to do with going to mass, taking communion, going to a Baptist church and being baptized, attending church, praying, tithing. You still think it's something you have to do, and you can't even see the kingdom of God. That's what Jesus said to Nicodemus.

"Nicodemus, you can't see it unless you're born again."

"Wait a minute, how can I be born again? Can I go back into mother's womb?" Nicodemus asked.

"No, I'm not talking about a physical birth. I'm using a physical birth as an analogy, Nicodemus. You've been born physically, but you've got to be born of the spirit. If you're not born again, you'll never enter the kingdom of God. You won't see it unless you're born again, and you won't enter it unless you're born again."

Now the question I want to ask everybody is, *have you been born again?* Has there ever been a time in your life where you passed from death into life and you experienced a new beginning by the power of Jesus Christ? Upon the authority of what Jesus said to a religious man, I want to say to every one of you listening to me: If you have not been born again, you will not see the kingdom, nor will you enter it.

When you are born again, your character is changed and your nature is changed. I was born physically on January 16, 1953. When I was born, I inherited the nature, the character of both my parents. I look kind of like my dad looked when he was my age. I act like my mother in some respects. I inherited their character. And you see, when you are born of the spirit, you inherit spiritually the character and nature of your heavenly father. You are changed. That's why Jesus said it's like being born again. On March 11, 1961, I was born again, and at that time, I received a new nature. And God began too. He changed my character from the inside out and ever since then, he's been working on my conduct. That's the way it works. The test of the true Christian is, has your character, your nature, ever been changed?

Let me give you an example the Bible uses. It is the picture of a pig wallowing around in a mud hole, having a great time in all that mud and mess. We're going to get that pig out of the mud hole and we're going to bring him into our home. We're going to put him in the bathtub and wash him off and really clean him good. We'll scrub him, use shampoo, dry him off with a hair drier, and then dab a little Chanel No. 5 behind his ear, and then we're going to put a blue ribbon around his neck. We're going to put that pig right there in our living room and we're going to say, "Look at that. That is a cleaned-up pig. My stars! That is a reformed pig." Now that's what religion can do. But as soon as you open the front door of your house and that pig sees that mud hole, you know what he's going to do? It's going to take him about two seconds. Splat! He's back in the mud hole. Do you know why? Because it is the nature of a pig to wallow in the mud.

The grossest verse of scripture in the Bible, in my opinion, is 2 Peter 2:22, "The dog has returned to his own vomit and the pig that was washed has returned to wallowing in the mud." That verse means if your character has never been changed, your behavior won't be changed. But when your character has been changed, your behavior will be changed.

Do you remember the pig in the mud? Let me use another animal. Let's take a cat, and let's put a cat in a mud puddle. Is that cat going to wallow in that mud? No. I have a cat. I know what it's going to do. It's going to tiptoe out of the mud and he's going to sit down and start cleaning himself. That's the nature of a cat. It is the nature of a cat to be a clean animal like that. It is the nature of a pig to be a dirty animal like that. You can't blame them; it's their nature.

Now I'm talking about people here. If you claim to be a Christian—and you can claim anything—but you spend most of your time wallowing in the moral filth and the sinful mud out there and you're having a grand time, and you have no guilt or remorse whatsoever, you're not a Christian.

You may be a religious person, but if you're at home in the mud, your nature has never been changed.

There are some of you who have been changed, you have been saved, and when you get in that mud and that pit, like some of you have been in and are right now, you feel such pangs of remorse and guilt. And something inside of you says, "This is not my nature." Just like the prodigal son Jesus spoke about, who ended up in a pigpen with the pigs, and said, "This is not my nature. I'm going to rise and I'm going to go back to my father." Do you know why? He had a different nature; he had a different character than those pigs.

By the way, that's what some of you need to do today who are in the moral filth that you're in. You need to get up and say, "I'm going to go back to my Father, because this is not my nature. I'm not at home in this situation." You see, that's what salvation is. It starts with a change of your character, being born again, that results in you changing your conduct, the way you act. That's the kingdom of God explained.

II. THE KINGDOM OF GOD EXPERIENCED

How do you experience the kingdom of God? There are three aspects that are mentioned.

1. It is righteousness in the Holy Spirit

Now, in each one of these, I want us to look at what it means to your character, that's who you are, and then how it affects your conduct, what you do.

Your character: We are declared right before God

We are declared right before God. See, there are two kinds of righteousness. There are the righteous conditions that you can try to earn or there is the righteousness that you can accept by faith when you believe. Look at Romans 10:3-4, talking about the problem with the Jews. "Since they did not know the righteousness that comes from God and sought to establish their own, they did not submit to God's righteousness, Christ is the end of the law, so that there may be righteousness for everyone who believes."

Once you are born again, once you are truly saved, God looks at you through the filter of the righteousness of his Son, and He declares you righteous. You know, a lot of times I ask this question, but I'm not going to ask it any more: How many of you in this room are righteous? Not many of you hold up your hands, because you think I'm talking about self-righteous. I'm talking about are you righteous in Jesus Christ? If you are in Christ, you are my friend, declared righteous. That's your character.

What about your conduct? This is where the rubber hits the road. Number one, character has to do with your positional righteousness. This has to do with your practical righteousness. Here's how it relates to your conduct:

Conduct: We desire to live right before others

And if you don't desire to live right before others, your character has never been changed. If you have no desire to live a righteous, holy life, just go back. You need to be born again.

This is what Paul writes to Titus. "The Bible teaches us to say 'no' to ungodliness and worldly passions, and to live self-controlled, upright and godly lives in this present age."

If you want to live the way God ordained you to live, you won't be perfect. But there will be a daily desire for you to live holy and pure and clean before the Lord. When you do stumble, when you do fail, when you do sin, when you end up in that pigpen, you're going to say, "This is not where I belong," and you're going to do what the prodigal son did. You're going to get up and repent and return to your Father.

Whenever you find yourself in the pigpen of sin, 1 John 1:9 is the verse you claim. It says, "If we confess our sins, He is faithful and just to forgive us and to cleanse us of all unrighteousness." I love that word "cleanse" us of all unrighteousness. You see, once and for all, you were saved and God forgives your sin, past, present or future. But every day, many times during the day, we have to come to him for cleansing to stay clean before the Lord.

When I was a kid, one of my favorite toys to play with was this little thing called Etch-a-Sketch. Do they even have those anymore? They're probably computerized now. You can make little lines and squiggles this way and that way with them. I loved to play with an Etch-a-Sketch. My favorite part of it was when you had all the lines messed up, you could take the thing and you know what? Turn it over and shake it, turn it back, and it's all erased. Did you know friend that 1 John 1:9 is the Etch-a-Sketch for a Christian? You come before God with your sins and your failings and your problems and you say, "God, this is the mess I made of it. I'm calling upon you to forgive me and to cleanse me," and God shakes you and cleanses you of all unrighteousness. You can't live perfectly, but you can live clean before the Lord. There is righteousness in the Holy Spirit.

2. There is peace in the Holy Spirit

By the way, I want you to know, these are sequential. These are not just three unrelated elements. I think, first of all, it takes righteousness before you can have peace. Here's how it relates to your character:

Character: We have peace with God. (salvation)

Peace with God. It's what it says in Romans 5:1. "Therefore since we have been justified through faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ."

Here's another part of your character:

We may claim the peace of God

That speaks of your security. It says in Philippians 4:7, "And the peace of God which transcends all understanding will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus." You see your birthright, your spiritual birthright as a Christian is peace *with* God, but also the peace *of* God. There are some of you who are so stressed-out as Christians, who are so full of anxiety, so bothered; you're as frustrated as a termite in a yo-yo. You have bitten your fingernails almost up to the elbow. And you're saved, but you're not claiming the peace of God that is yours by your spiritual birthright.

Every late summer to early fall, several hurricanes roll in off the African coast and hit the Caribbean. Sometimes they hit our continent. A hurricane is an amazing storm, because on the outer rims there may be winds in excess of 150 miles an hour along with tornadoes and thunder and lightning, but right in the center of that storm, there is an eye of tranquility called the "eye of the storm." Pilots who have flown aircraft in there have said it's amazing. It's totally calm. Submarines have surfaced in the eye of a hurricane and said it's amazing, there's hardly any breeze whatsoever. The water is calm, like a lake. All around you see a wall of massive thunderstorm, but in the center there is the eye of tranquility.

Did you know for a Christian, peace is not the absence of problems? It is tranquility in the midst of a storm, in the midst of problems. You and I have a right to claim this eye of a hurricane, because when everything is falling apart around us, when everything is storming around us, you and I can have the peace of God that passes all understanding.

I've been as amazed as you have about what happened at Wedgewood Baptist Church. I'm not talking about just the shooting, but some of the events surrounding the night seven people were shot by the gunman. After he had already emptied a couple of clips, there was a teenager who, without fear, walked up to the gunman while he was shooting and basically witnessed to him and told him he needed God. The gunman pointed his gun at the teenager and pulled the trigger—but the clip was empty. And without fear, that young teenager stood there sharing his faith with that guy, and the guy jammed in another clip. And the next sound was him shooting himself.

You know, his jacket was full of clips full of ammunition. He could have killed dozens of more people there. They were pinned down. But here was one young man that walked up and shared his faith without fear. People say, "How could he do that?" When asked, he said, "It was Jesus." You know, the world can't understand that kind of courage and the world can't understand that kind of peace. That's why the Bible says, "It is a peace that passes all understanding." When the world is falling apart around you, you can have the peace of God.

Now off of that has to do with your character but what about your conduct? It says, my friend, that if you have the peace of God, and peace with God, your conduct, you can say this.

Conduct: We seek peace with others

You will seek to live at peace with others. You still have your Bible open to Romans 14? Look down there at verse 19, the verse after our text. It says, "Let us therefore make every effort to do what leads to peace and a mutual edification." Now, the context of this passage is this: There may be another believer who disagrees with you on some of these nonessential issues. The Bible

says if you're living in the power of the Holy Spirit, you can live in love and in peace with that other believer.

John Wesley, founder of the Methodist church, was a strong Arminian who believed in free choice. George Whitfield, another contemporary famous preacher in England during the time, was an evangelist who believed in Calvinism. Wesley and Whitfield held two divergent theological positions and they disagreed over it. In fact, a London newspaper published a story about the terrible controversy. But they refused to be angry with one other. In fact, in 1740, George Whitfield wrote a letter to John Wesley:

The doctrine of election, I am 10,000 times more convinced than I was when I saw you last. You believe otherwise. Why, then, should we dispute when there is no possibility of convincing each other? Will it not in the end destroy our brotherly love? How glad would be the enemies of the Lord to see us divided.

Then he wrote:

Were you here, I would weep over you with tears of love.

In fact, the newspaper went to George Whitfield and tried to cause to enhance the sensational controversy. They're still doing that in the press today. And they said, "Mr. Whitfield, do you even think that John Wesley will be in heaven?"

"No, I don't think I will see John Wesley in heaven?" Whitfield said.

"You won't see John Wesley in heaven?" They thought they had a headline.

"No listen to me. John Wesley is such a godly man, that he'll be so close to the throne of God in heaven and I'll be so far away that I won't even see him in heaven." Whitfield replied.

What a spirit of peace and what a spirit of love and acceptance, even though they disagreed on some points of doctrine. That's what this whole text is about, my friend. Righteousness in the Holy Spirit, peace in the Holy Spirit, and

3. Joy in the Holy Spirit.

You know what joy is? Some people say, "Joy. J-O-Y. Jesus, Others, Yourself." The key to joy is not Jesus, Others, Yourself, even though I used to say that. The key to joy is Jesus, Jesus, Jesus. He is the only key to joy. Let's talk about our character. First of all,

Character: We possess the joy of Jesus

It's in us by our character. It's not happiness. This is what Jesus said in John 15:11. He said, "I have told you this, so that my joy may be in you and that your joy may be complete." Listen to me, Christian. You cannot lose your salvation. I believe that with all my heart, once you are born again, you can't lose your salvation, but the Bible says you *can* lose the *joy* of your salvation.

In Psalms 51 when David was praying, he said, "Restore unto me the joy of your salvation." There are a lot of you looking at me and listening to me right now. You're saved. When you die,

you'll go to heaven. But you know what? You're living without the joy of the Lord and you're missing out on what is yours as a Christian. We possess the joy of the Lord, but this is how it relates to our conduct:

Conduct: We express this joy in all circumstances

That's why Paul writes in Philippians 4:4, "Rejoice in the Lord always, again I say rejoice."

I've been in love with Jesus for many years. I just am enjoying the Christian life. There's a difference between enduring religion and enjoying the Christian life. And I made a decision years ago, I don't care who else is going to be miserable as a Christian, I'm not going to be. I'm just going to enjoy Jesus. I'm going to enjoy the joy of Jesus, and nobody is going to rob my joy. You see, Satan is the one that wants to rob our joy, but don't let him do it.

I like to watch the kids draw pictures of me. A lot of times when I'm preaching, some young children who aren't listening to what I'm saying may be drawing a picture of me. Or when we're doing our Pastor's Pals booklets, they're asked to draw a picture of me. I love looking at those pictures. They usually have me with my arms up here, with a Bible open. Several months when Arlene and I were looking at those pictures, she pointed something out to me. She said, "Have you noticed that in all of those pictures, the kids have drawn you smiling?" I said, "I didn't think about it." She said, "I think that is so precious, because when they see you up there talking about Jesus, they know you're happy about Jesus." I got such a blessing out of that. That's great. Kids, if you don't understand a word I say, I want you to know, I'm happy about Jesus, okay?

I am deliriously joyful about being a Christian, and I'm not going to let anybody steal that from me. It's easy to be joyful when things are going well, but when the joy of the Lord shines is when things are going bad, and you still make the choice to rejoice. You say, "I don't feel like rejoicing." Well, when you don't feel like rejoicing, that's when you ought to make the choice to rejoice. You can act your way into a feeling a whole lot better than you can feel your way into an action. You didn't realize how profound that was, so I better say that again, all right? You can act your way into a feeling a whole lot better than you can feel your way into an action. "I don't feel like rejoicing; I'm just going to wait until I feel like it." You won't feel like it. But you just start by choice, choosing to rejoice, and before you know it, you'll feel like it.

Joyce, one of my church secretaries in Alabama, used to have a little saying, which I kind of adopted, It's based upon that little riddle about Pete and Repeat. Do you remember hearing this riddle when you were a kid? Pete and Repeat were sitting on a fence. Pete fell off. Who was left, Mike? [Mike: "Repeat"] All right, I'll do it. Pete and Repeat—you all know that. You know what Joyce used to say? She used to say, "Joyce and Rejoice were sitting on a fence. Joyce has fallen off and so is left? Rejoice." That was her way of saying, "Whenever I fall off, whenever I fall down, whenever I have trouble, only one that's left is Rejoice." What a great lesson.

I learned more about joy from a lady in the church I served in South Alabama than I learned from reading all the scriptures and all the books on joy I ever read. This lady's name was Jeanette Davis. She was a woman with rheumatoid arthritis. She was hardly even able to attend church. Her hands were gathered up in like claws, and she was in such pain, but every time I

went to see her at her house, she had the joy of Jesus that radiated out of her eyes and radiated through her smile. I always was so blessed to be with Jeanette. Since that time, she's gone to be with the Lord. One day I said, "Jeanette, you just are a blessing to me. Where do you get your joy?" Although she didn't have a very beautiful voice, she just smiled real big and she said, "Whenever I feel bad, I just start singing this song:

'The joy of the Lord is my strength.
The joy of the Lord is my strength.
The joy of the Lord is my strength.
The joy of the Lord is my strength.'"

I want to you know, Jeanette Davis taught me that never again am I going to moan and groan and whine and complain, because if there's anybody on the face of the earth who had a right to complain, and not have joy, it was her. She radiated joy. She even had another verse that she sang to that song that went, "My heart is full of laughter Ha, ha, ha, ha." And she'd sing it like that. Hey, let's try it. Here we go. Everybody sing it with me, ready?

My heart is filled with laughter, "Ha, ha, ha, ha, ha.
Everybody!
My heart is filled with laughter, ha, ha, ha, ha, ha.
My heart is filled with laughter, ha, ha, ha, ha, ha.
The joy of the Lord is my strength."

Now, you've got to admit, you feel a little better after singing that, don't you? You can act your way into a feeling better than you can feel your way into an action. And so as Christians, we have the righteousness in the Holy Spirit, our character, our conduct; the peace in the Holy Spirit, our character, our conduct; and our joy in the Holy Spirit, our character and our conduct.

And the final question I want to ask you is, my friend

Does your conduct match the character of Christ?

Are you living out who you are in Christ Jesus? Have you been born again?

I want to finish by telling you a story, a true story about a young man by the name of Charles Murray. He was training for the U.S. Olympics in 1968 as a college student in platform diving. He was one of these guys who stood on those different height platforms and jumped off, twisting and turning into the water. Charles Murray was a college student and he not a Christian, although he was a very religious person, was raised in a religious family, had dropped out of religion when he got to high school and college, as is often the case for religious people. But he had a friend who was also on the swim team who was a member of the Fellowship of Christian Athletes. His friend began to witness to him, telling him about Jesus. And he shared some scriptures with him.

One day his friend sat down with a gospel tract and shared the entire plan of salvation with him. He said to Charles, "Wouldn't you like to trust Christ, wouldn't you like to be saved today?"

And Charles couldn't accept him because he was so steeped in religion all of his life as a child. He said, "No, I don't want to do it." And so the guy gave him the tract. Charles was so burdened he left school and went home for a few days just to think about it. He reread the tract, read some scriptures and just couldn't get any peace. He was miserable about it. So he drove all the way back to campus late one night.

And because he was training for the Olympics, Charles had his own key to the indoor swimming and diving pavilion. He went in there late at night. It was pitch dark. He knew his way around and he climbed up to the top of the platform even in the pitch dark. And because diving sort of calmed him, he decided he would practice some of his dives there in that darkened pool area. He stood there on the platform and turned his back on the water and hung his feet over the platform and put his arms out preparing to do a dive. Just as he stood there, he said the moon came out from behind the cloud and shone through a window in the far end casting the shadow of a cross on the wall behind him. And he said when he saw the shadow of a cross; he said he knew God was speaking to him. He fell to his knees right there on that platform, and 30 feet above the pool, he gave his heart and life to Jesus, weeping, as best he knew how. "God, I don't know what to say. I just trust you." Before he could get up off his knees, the lights came on in the pool area. He wondered who would be there so late. It was a maintenance worker checking on the repair they made on the bottom of the pool, because the pool had been drained the day before to make repairs. And he stood there, within a few moments of diving into an empty pool, but he saw the shadow of the cross, and that made all the difference.

My friend, the cross can make all the difference for you, too.

OUTLINE

I. THE KINGDOM OF GOD EXPLAINED

1. NOT a list of external rules (Religion)
2. A life in subjection to the ruler (Relationship)
 - a. First your character is changed
 - b. Then you change your conduct

II. THE KINGDOM OF GOD EXPERIENCED

1. Righteousness in the Holy Spirit

Character: We are declared right before God

Since they did not know the righteousness that comes from God and sought to establish their own, they did not submit to God's righteousness. Christ is the end of the law so that there may be righteousness for everyone who believes. *Romans 10:3-4*

Conduct: We desire to live right before others

It teaches us to say "No" to ungodliness and worldly passions, and to live self-controlled, upright and godly lives in this present age. *Titus 2:12*

2. Peace in the Holy Spirit

Character: We have peace with God (Salvation)

Therefore, since we have been justified through faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ ... *Romans 5:1*

We may claim the peace of God (Security)

And the peace of God, which transcends all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus. *Philippians 4:7*

Conduct: We seek peace with others

3. Joy in the Holy Spirit

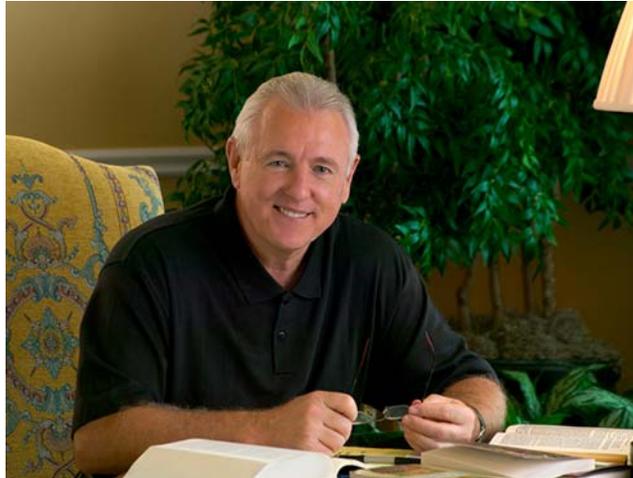
Character: We possess the joy of Jesus (Not happiness)

I have told you this so that my joy may be in you and that your joy may be complete. *John 15:11*

Conduct: We express this joy in all circumstances

Rejoice in the Lord always. I will say it again: Rejoice! *Philippians 4:4*

Does your conduct match the character of Christ?



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For the Joy...
Pastor David Dykes