
Question Time — Do we need to re-appraise the Kingdom?

--- By Elder Bill Jones

When I was a young man I worked for a jewelry company. One of my main responsibilities was to appraise jewelry and assign values for insurance purposes.

One day a man entered the store with a ring to be appraised. He had received it as part of an estate settlement. The ring was so dirty and dull that it was impossible to discern the nature or value of the ring or the size of the stone. Neither the man nor I felt, from its outward appearance, it would be of much value.

After cleaning the ring I was amazed to discover a near-flawless brilliant diamond of good size set in a beautiful old-fashioned gold mounting. It was of considerable worth and the man was stunned when he discovered what he possessed. He had planned to divest himself of the ring, but upon discovering its beauty and value, decided it would be far better to keep it.

This story is an illustration of a similar condition which may be affecting our appraisal of our church and what we have inherited. It is possible that, over time, the layers of doubt, confusion, misinformation, disappointment, etc., have clouded and distorted the vision we have of the church. Thus we have come to *not* see its beauty, properly assess its value or accurately determine its nature or potential.

If we can clear away those things which cloud or distort our vision and make an honest appraisal, what can we see?

The beauty of this church is that it was given to mankind, by God, as a Divine creation that had the potential and commission to become the physical representation of God's kingdom on earth. It was intended to be more than just spiritual, but to also have form and physical substance because it was for the earth, and was to be built upon the earth.

Because the early saints believed all that, they also believed the church was filled with God's spirit. With that spirit they could teach the gospel of Christ with emphasis on his moral and social ideals, and they could do it with power and authority.

They believed in the mission to build the Kingdom. They believed in inviting other people to share in it.

They believed they could set the example of working out their salvation while being in the world but not of it. F. Henry Edwards wrote, ". . . they came to recognize that the idea of personal salvation must give way to the idea of world redemption, and that no man must think of his own salvation apart from the extension of the reign of God into the lives of other people."

Unfortunately, time, with its disappointments, failures and distortions, has settled over the church and diminished its brilliance and beauty like the diamond I appraised with its initial many coats of grime and dirt. But the Kingdom with its commission and wonderful promises must never be rejected just because its visibility has been reduced.

It has constantly suffered violence and has consistently been delayed. As Elbert A. Smith observed, "The slow progress of the Kingdom on earth is due to the fact that God respects human agency and waits for education, enlightenment, conversion, regeneration, and a voluntary cooperation of oft-times blundering human beings."

Elbert A. Smith's statement offers a reason. It does not offer an excuse. Mankind has been slow to respond to God's offer of the Kingdom, but you and I cannot afford to wait if we hope for something better.

Let us take the church and its commitment to the Kingdom out of the realm of speculation. The Kingdom has been in the heart of God from the beginning, and God has committed the church to the task of helping the Kingdom to take on a literal concrete form in a specific place with a specific social order.

So there would be no mistake in determining its immediacy or its availability, Christ has said the Kingdom of Heaven is at hand. He also likened the Kingdom to a "grain of mustard seed," so we could understand the inherent potential for greatness within the Kingdom. For those of us who would accept the task, he wanted us to understand the time, patience and work required to see it thru to its fruition. Like the man who brought his ring to be appraised, it is good to sometimes re-appraise the Kingdom and establish anew its value in our hearts and minds.

"God has been so specific it should deter us from thinking we have the luxury of determining when we should do it or if we should do it. The question is: Will we do it?"