

When the lawyer in Jesus' famous Parable of the Good Samaritan asks, 'what shall I do to inherit eternal life?' most folks sitting in the church pews seem to know what he meant. The lawyer is asking how he can get to heaven! This is completely off the mark. In Jesus' time the Jewish concept of eternal life is not the same as our modern Christian concept at all. Jesus' gospel proclamation is 'The Kingdom of God is at hand!' In a nutshell, the lawyer is asking him, 'How shall I be able to enter into the Kingdom of God?'

The contemporary church has talked a great deal about eternal life but very little of the Kingdom of God. And yet, in most Christian worship, we still recite the prayer Jesus taught his disciples, 'Thy Kingdom come, on earth as it is in heaven!' What did Jesus know how the Kingdom of God looks like? Personally I believe Jesus, in his time in the wilderness, did reflect a great deal on the Royal Psalms as contained in the Old Testament, particularly Psalm 72. This the Psalm Nicola sang in the service.

One of the arguments for Australia becoming a Republic is that we don't really have a king or queen residing in this country and there is no royal family in this county to be found which can replace the existing queen once she's gone. And one of the reasons why the younger generation of Australians tend to support the Republic idea is probably due to the fact that they never study European or English history in which kings and queens play such an important part. Even in church school, I doubt students have to study Old Testament history; the standard texts for it are 1 & 2 Kings and 1 & 2 Chronicles.

As a student I suffered a great deal in our study of Chinese history in which we had to learn the details about kings and queens of ancient dynasties. But looking back from hindsight, the interesting fact is that we could not say there never existed a perfect king. The only interesting ones were the bad ones and the rest were just so mediocre that we forgot them completely! Therefore, for us late modern people, it is rather difficult to realize what the king meant in the life of an ancient people.

This afternoon let us learn from Psalm 72. This is one of the many royal Psalms in the collection that find its way into the book of Psalms. The old title (not part of the original Psalm) is '*To Solomon*'. This does not necessarily mean that the Psalm was written in Solomon's time; more likely it is a later and idealized picture of that state of peace and prosperity which was believed to

have existed in the days of Solomon. However, we may put a new Title to it: *A King shall reign*. Let us learn three features from this Psalm.

First, the king was a representative of God to his people. The king is represented as receiving the law of his kingdom from God (v.1). So much so that at times almost divine qualities are attributed to him. This idea is not unique in Israel; in ancient China, the emperor had the title 'The Son of Heaven.' The ancient Chinese would certainly agree with the saying in the Book of Lamentations, 'The breadth of our nostrils, the Lord's anointed.' Even today, still a large portion of the Japanese population regard the emperor as divine! And that is the where the danger lies because he can arouse total commitment from his subjects.

Now this great song of the Kingdom can be interpreted just in terms of national aggrandizement – all the nations of the world will come to acknowledge the authority of the divinely appointed king. But what saves the picture from being unpleasantly nationalistic is the emphasis on the sovereignty of God. However, sovereignty of God must not be seen in terms of might and power. God is righteous, and that is where his sovereignty found. His righteousness means He cares for the poor and the needy. This leads to our second feature.

As I mentioned earlier, the interesting kings are usually the bad ones, and in Israel the famous bad king is Ahab and his wife Jezebel. King Ahab abused his God-appointed authority and violated the law of God. When he desired a piece of land which was owned by an ordinary citizen he realized there was no way he could obtain it, but his wife Jezebel used the most violent and wicked way to murder the land owner and gave it to Ahab! In ancient China, such things occurred constantly but no citizen could ever dare to complain against the emperors. However, that is not so with Israel. The first feature says that the law of the kingdom is the Law of God. Nowadays we keep using the word 'justice', but in ancient Israel the divine law is a law of mercy, demanding the protection of the weak and helpless. It is especially in this that the sovereignty of the king is seen. In other words, compassion is more important than justice. This is very important because too often in the name of justice we have neglected compassion completely.

The third feature of the kingship in this Psalm is this: Because of the righteousness of this kingdom, universal dominion is promised to it 'unto the

ends of the earth.' (v.8) Interestingly, this same idea also occurred in ancient China. The highest ideal or aspiration of every good king was to expect a universal dominion in which everyone lives peacefully. In World War II, the Japanese wanted to use military force to establish a worldwide kingdom! However, history tells us both Israel and China failed to achieve this end. Therefore how do we understand this feature? The kings of Israel as the representative of God are supposed to reflect the character of God in whose name each acts; but each of them failed, some failed more badly than others. This really makes us aware that no human king can ever establish a universal kingdom in which righteousness is to be seen everywhere.

Only God himself can achieve that. That is exactly what he did. It is clear that our Lord himself had deeply meditated on this picture of the divine kingdom and its king. Verses 7 & 8 of this Psalm are found again in Zechariah 9:10; this is the passage which speaks of the king coming to Jerusalem humble and riding on an ass. This is what our Lord Jesus exactly did when he entered into Jerusalem. He believed he was fulfilling the promise of Zechariah in which the king who is 'lowly, and riding upon an ass, even upon a colt the foal of an ass.' Jesus believed that the Kingdom of God he proclaimed is the fulfilment of the promise of righteousness and universal dominion of Psalm 72. All human kings had tried and failed to fulfil the promise, but when Jesus came he fulfilled it in a completely different way, not by force nor by might but by His total commitment and obedience to the will of God.

Every time when we say the Lord's Prayer, 'Thy kingdom come', it is not wishful thinking. It is rather a reminder of our responsibility. Being citizens of the Kingdom of God, we have the duty to reflect the true character of this Kingdom that has already come on earth. Jesus promises us that one day we shall rule the whole earth with Him. Therefore, now as His representative or ambassador the Church must exhibit these three features of the righteous Kingdom. Whenever and wherever the will of Jesus is obeyed, what comes into existence is at least a reflection of the Kingdom as it is shown to us in this Psalm: (1) its total dependence upon God and upon his orders, (2) its loving and compassionate service to the weak and the oppressed, (3) its endeavour in universal extension which really means the Gospel is to be preached and lived out all over the world. That is the yardstick of a faithful Church.