



THE NEW SHOFAR

I consider the sufferings of this present time are not worth comparing with the glory about to be revealed to us. Romans 8:18

July 30th

In what ways are we prepared to transform our lives so that God can reign?

The Kingdom of God in today's parable is not likened to the treasure the man found in the field. It is like a man finding a treasure. Its focus is on what he does, what he is prepared to undertake in order to have the treasure for himself.

The Kingdom of God is also like a man searching for fine pearls. How far is he prepared to travel? What risks is he willing to undertake? How *fine* must the pearls be for him to do all of this?

Similarly with the fisherman. The Kingdom in this parable is *like the net being thrown into the sea*. It is about him acting, doing something. He uses his knowledge, experience and the suggestions of others before he throws out his nets.

In all of these parables of the Kingdom the focus is on the action, what the person is doing in order to have the great reward. Yes, the end results are known and earnestly desired but without the man doing something, he will end up with nothing.

What then is the Kingdom of God?

There have been more books written in attempts to explain the nature of the Kingdom of God than I have had birthdays. We used to think we knew what it was based on our own experience and knowledge of the kingdoms of this earth. But God's Kingdom is nothing like these and they are of limited value in our quest for understanding.

As is true of so many aspects of God, we are better off thinking in terms of verbs – God is doing something. Saying God just is does not help us gain many insights into the nature of God. We are much better off experiencing the justice of God flowing out into our lives and into the world. God is *justice in action*. We experience God doing justice, are humbled by the way God's justice has healed me and brings freedom to others.

The same can be said of God and love. Saying *God is love* is all well and true but what does it mean? Far better it is for us to say God is *love-outreaching* into our lives, being-showered-down upon us. God's love is always a moving-out-from-himself love, a verb rather than a noun or an adjective. God is better understood in terms of our experiencing his works in our lives, in creation.

That question is still there – what is the Kingdom of God?

Most modern Bible commentators prefer to speak more of the *reign of God* than the Kingdom of God. God does not have a kingdom, nor does God have need of a Kingdom. What God does is reign over all of creation, over all that was, that is and whatever is still to come. God *reigns*. God *is reigning*, now and forever. This is the lived experience of Israel and of Christians down through history. It is what keeps people going when dark and difficult times come their way. It is the knowledge that God is reigning that offers us hope. It means God truly is a King who is ruling, a King who has no equivalent spiritual or earthly king.

One powerful example of this can be found in the Book of Revelation. That prophetic work comes from a vision given to John by God. He was taken up into heaven and placed at the very end of history. From that position at the End he could look back over time and know how things are going to unfold. They all end in the victory of God. The divine plan put in place by God is unfolding according to the divine will. While there are many forces, people, opportunities and sheer evil seeking to derail things, God wins. This is what John is writing to the people of his own churches. Forget worrying about the Roman officials who want to kill you, the Jews who want to exile you from the synagogues and the general population who want you removed from existence because you scare them. In all these things, *God-is-reigning*. Even when we may not see it; when we truly wonder if God is present and acting; even when we feel we have come to the end, even there, even then, God reigns.

Jesus and the reigning-of-God

The challenge in today's parables is to take up the invitation to live under this divine ruling. In this way the kingdom is a bit like a treasure, a pearl of great price and a net full of fish. It represents everything we need and desire in our lives in our pursuit of meaning, purpose, and eternal life. Only when God is allowed to *reign-over-us* are these things accessible. Only with God reigning can we be the people we are created to be and called to become. Without living in this manner, we are left without hope. We desire to have such a treasure, but we treat it more like a lottery than a reality. We *wish* it was true, but we are not prepared to invest everything, our whole selves in allowing God into our hearts just in case it is not.

The fisherman, the pearl hunter and the treasure seeker all have one thing in common. They are prepared to do the hard yards of placing themselves in a position to obtain that which they seek more than anything else. In Christ Jesus, God has offered us an invitation, is inviting us to live with him ruling over us and through us. But he leaves us with a choice – to accept or to reject. There is not middle road, not half-hearted disciples. The only way unto this divine ruling is through the selling off of *everything we have*, divesting ourselves of ultimate control of our identities and our futures.

Is this not exactly what we find Solomon doing in our reading from 1 Kings? What he asks of God is a discerning mind, a wise heart so that he is able to truly be the conduit of divine love and care for the people placed in his care. He could have anything he wanted and the thing he desired most of all is a discerning heart. He asked for the wisdom needed to search for and to find God at work in Israel. He was king of Israel but he desired nothing more than the assurance that it was God who was ruling. In the words of Paul in **Romans 8**...*I am convinced that neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor rulers, nor things present, nor things to come, nor powers, nor height, nor depth nor anything else in all creation can separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord.* All we need to do then is to live this promise, this divine guarantee.

This is how we know we are living under God's direct rule. We fear nothing. We fear nothing because we are filled with hope, not wishing that all things will be well, but knowing with an absolute certainty that as long as we allow God room to reign in us, the future is there for us to inherit – life with God, now and forever. As with the characters in our parables, God is offering all of this to us the next step is ours.