

The Kingdom of Heaven is at Hand

by Rebecca Bynum (June 2015)



John the Baptist in the Wilderness by Guido Reni

“The Kingdom of Heaven is at hand. Repent, for the time is nigh,” so proclaimed the courageous prophet John the Baptist for he saw the passing away of the old age and the coming of the new. In his mind, this process would culminate in the deliverance of the Jewish people politically as well as spiritually. Most Jews of his day believed in the coming Messiah as a political deliverer who would re-establish the throne of David and acting as King of the Jews, expel the Romans and re-establish Jewish sovereignty in and around Jerusalem, thus inaugurating a golden age for the Jewish people on a material as well as a spiritual level. All awaited the coming of the Messiah. John declared him to be Jesus.

However Jesus proclaimed, “The Kingdom of Heaven is within you” and “My Kingdom is not of this world.” Jesus never intended to institute a political kingdom and thus he was greatly misunderstood even by his own Apostles. Instead, he brought a greater revelation to all mankind: the character of God portrayed and the love of God demonstrated. Jesus was a bridge between heaven and earth; a living way for man to reach higher than he ever had before, free from enslavement to tradition and ritual. A revolution, yes, but of the spirit. The Kingdom of Heaven did include the fellowship of believers and the consciousness of their entry into a *family* – the Fatherhood of God and the Brotherhood of Man, but the Kingdom of Heaven itself as Jesus portrayed it was, and is, entirely spiritual.

After the crucifixion, Jesus’ Jewish followers continued to believe that he would soon return “in power and glory” to institute the Kingdom on earth and fulfill the traditional role of Messiah. Later, as the gentile Church was firmly established, the figure of Jesus was transformed from the Messiah of the Jews to the Redeemer of the Church. Membership in the Church gradually became a substitute for the spiritual brotherhood of the Kingdom of Heaven. Entry into this man-made institution and conformity to its requirements acted as surrogate for entry into the spiritual Kingdom of Heaven as a real and personal spiritual experience. Intellectual ascent to church doctrine was thought to be prerequisite for salvation. Eventually, those who sought to differ with church doctrine were persecuted and the popular

revolt thus made necessary continues to this day.

However it may seem, the Master's mission has not failed. Jesus lived his life in perfect accordance with the Father's will and therefore his message is assured immortality. Christianity will never die, though it will certainly transform just as a caterpillar transforms into a butterfly. The Kingdom of Heaven is a living reality, not simply an intellectual doctrine. Indeed, the church may be thought of as a cocoon through which the sleeping power of Christ's word and his powerful symbolism will one day awaken and the Kingdom of Heaven will be reborn in the hearts of men – a social revolution ignited by individual spiritual awakening.

The Kingdom of Heaven cannot be promulgated by force, only by persuasion and the power of the spirit. Jesus demonstrated the nature of God and of the Kingdom by washing the feet of his Apostles. The son of God came to serve man, not to be served by him and certainly not to become an earthly king. Christ was Master and servant at once. He also likened the Kingdom of Heaven to leaven which when mixed into meal leavens it all – the whole man is transformed, and then eventually, the whole society, the nation and finally the whole world.

All creeds, religions and ideologies which are spread by force are by no means a part of the living Kingdom of Heaven. In recent times, Nazism and Marxism, both vehemently anti-Christian and both spread and sustained by force, were uprooted. Nazism is utterly dead and Marxism is yet in the process of dying. The next global crisis will undoubtedly be sparked by the anti-Christian creed of Islam which has already extinguished the Kingdom over great swathes of the formerly Christian world. Seeking total world domination, Islam will continue to destroy until it too is rooted up and cast into the flames, its slaves freed and its memory blotted out, just as many strange and inhuman creeds have perished in the past.

The Father may indeed send another son to help correct the course of this world which is at present teetering on the brink of disaster. No doubt his angels are even now working furiously to prevent the worst, but nevertheless, it is certain that terrible destruction is coming and Western civilization may collapse altogether.

Will the world then be reborn? Will the Kingdom of Heaven resume its long suspended establishment? Will wars finally cease and the brotherhood of man yet dawn? Shall we proclaim once more, "The Kingdom of Heaven is at hand," as did the mighty prophet of old? For we know "faith is the substance of things hoped for, the evidence of things unseen." A new age will surely come as the old passes away in the beautiful and terrible time to come.

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