

The Law of Kingdom Concealment

by David Orton

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The kingdom of heaven is like a treasure hidden in the field ...

Matthew 13:44

The laws of the Kingdom of God are contrary to the ways of men.

Hidden from the casual seeker, the kingdom of God is not superficial to be stumbled upon. It does not lie on the surface and is not obvious—it is *"like a treasure hidden in the field"*. It is in fact, concealed, obscured from our natural perceptions.

Christ the King - the rock of offence

This fact flavours the whole coming of Christ the King in his first advent. The promised Messiah did not come as the anticipated warrior-King delivering Israel from Roman tyranny. To the contrary, born in obscurity, he came as a humble Nazarene, the son of Joseph riding on a donkey. Thus, Nathaniel's rhetorical exclamation concerning the Christ: *"Can any good thing come from Nazareth?"* (Jn 1:46). Defying human expectation of an earthly kingdom he became a stumbling stone—the rock of offence (Rom 9:32, 33).

Even after association with him as his closest intimates, throughout his earthly ministry, the disciples still misunderstood the kingdom. After the resurrection, and despite forty days of Jesus speaking concerning the Kingdom of God, nursing hopes of a worldly kingdom, they could still ask: *"Lord, is it at this time you are restoring the kingdom to Israel?"* (Acts 1:6).

They still perceived the kingdom in terms of external criteria, particularly social and political ones. However, while the kingdom will manifest through external signs, which I will discuss in a moment, it is primarily an inner and hidden reality. It is therefore, not discernible to the natural senses or cognitive abilities.

An invisible kingdom

Jesus underlined this when he said:

... God's kingdom isn't something you can see. There is no use saying, 'Look! Here it is' or 'Look! There it is.' God's kingdom is here among you [or, `within you'].

Luke 17:20, 21 CEV

Whether the original text refers to Christ standing *among* them or being present *within* them is a moot point. Either way, the Kingdom was present through the presence of Christ. Christ, whether incarnate or indwelling, is only so by the Spirit. The kingdom is, therefore, only present in its fullness when Christ dwells amongst men by the Spirit.

There is only one explicit New Testament descriptor of the kingdom of God:

for the kingdom of God is not eating and drinking, but righteousness and peace and joy in the Holy Spirit.

Romans 14:17 NASB

Here we learn that the kingdom is not only experiential but that it is *"in the Holy Spirit"*.

His presence is supernatural and, therefore, cannot be detected by natural observation.

As Paul declared:

the natural man is not able to take in the things of the Spirit of God: for they seem foolish to him, and he is not able to have knowledge of them, because such knowledge comes only through the Spirit.

1 Corinthians 2:14 BBE

Therefore, the first and primary sign of the Kingdom is invisible. It is Christ *in us*, the hope of glory (Col 1:27). This is personal and experiential.

No one will be able to say, "*Look, here it is!*" or "*There it is!*" No external or natural criteria will assist in locating the kingdom. It will not be found by looking at the outward—at the crowds, the leader, or the success. Nor will it be located in any particular structure, group, or event. Neither will it be found in political presence, community impact, or social transformation. We make a mistake to equate the kingdom with any of these. This is not to deny that they may occur through its presence, but they are not the kingdom. Nor are they the primary signs of the kingdom.

The nature of Jesus' kingdom is revolutionary, completely defying every human expectation of worldly influence and power. He declared:

My kingdom is not of this world. If My kingdom were of this world, then My servants would be fighting so that I would not be handed over to the Jews; but as it is, My kingdom is not of this realm.

John 18:36 NASB

With our contemporary quest for church growth, on one hand, and social transformation on the other, this lesson is crucial to the integrity of our high call in Christ Jesus. If we are desirous of pursuing Christ alone, we must not confuse that call with any lesser thing. If we do, it will be easy to trade the kingdom for a fast track — for visible results and perceived success—for numbers or community impact. The scary thing is that God may give us our desires, but with it "*leanness of soul*" (Ps 106:15).

Signs of the kingdom

Flowing from the supernatural presence of Christ, the primary signs of the Kingdom are:

- the preaching of the Gospel (Mtt 4:23; Lk 4:18),
- healings and miracles (Mtt 4:23; Lk 7:22),
- deliverance (Mtt 12:28),
- the new birth (Jn 3:3; Acts 26:18; Rom 14:17),
- Christ-likeness (Col 1:27, 28), and
- suffering (Acts 14:22; 1 Pet 2:21; 2 Tim 2:12).

Consequently, the kingdom advances in the earth not through campaigns of moral, political, or social reformation, nor even church growth; but through the primary sign of its presence—Christ dwelling in the hearts of men. As individual hearts yield to the regenerating power of the Spirit the kingdom will increase and ultimately accelerate to the transformation of entire cities and nations. Nation building and social transformation will only occur to the degree hearts are transformed. Reformation flows from regeneration. We can be confident that, as the climax of history, the river of God's Spirit flows to the ultimate healing of the nations (Rev 22:1-2).

The more excellent way

However, not all the signs of the kingdom are equal. Remember, like the Corinthians, we may experience the supernatural, but still be called up to the "*more excellent way*" (1Cor 12:31). As necessary as they are, even some of the supernatural signs of

the kingdom – the gifts and operations of the Spirit – can sometimes distract from the main play—from the Giver himself. As the product of Greek culture the West is prone to the Corinthian distraction of gifts and super-apostles – charisma and personality – "*looking only on the surface of things*" and "*taking pride in what is seen rather than in what is in the heart*" (2 Cor 10:7; 5:12).

Nevertheless, through the cacophony of competing voices – the madding crowd of false values and shimmering images – there is another sound being heard. It is the sound of heaven – of deep calling to deep – of the heart of God calling to the hearts of men – of our hearts burning within us: "*When You said, 'Seek My face,' my heart said to You, 'Your face, O LORD, I shall seek.'*" (Ps 27:8).

This is a call up to the *more excellent way*—it is the "*high calling of God in Christ Jesus*" (Phil 3:14). It has been said, "*Others may, but you may not*". As Paul explained: "*Everything is allowable, but not everything is profitable.*" (1 Cor 10:23 Weymouth). It is not the way of reputation and success within the systems of men, but the high road of *agape* – of love without hooks – of self-giving and perfect obedience to the Father. It is the love-slave who, when given his freedom, returns abandoning all for love of the master, having his ear pierced against the doorpost (see Ex 21:16). This is the question: has my ear been pierced by the high call of God? Have I truly heard what the Spirit is saying to the church and to me personally? Moreover, am I willing to abandon my way, my ministry, and my gifts for the *more excellent way*?

The *more excellent way* is the way of selfless love. This is what Paul is referring to when he says: "*... three things remain: faith, hope, and love. But the greatest of these is love*" (1 Cor 13:13). There are three realms in God: faith, hope and love; but our goal is the third—love. Faith and hope relate to what God *does* – the gifts and callings of God – but love to who he *is*. This is a realm of total abandonment; of being overwhelmed by the God who is *agape* and "*who fills all in all*" (1 Jn 4:8; Eph 1:23).

When we attain this realm, the "perfect" (*telios*) – or rather mature – will have come. All else will lose its currency (1 Cor 13:10). When we discover and walk in this new way our ministry, our impact in the community, our churches, endeavours and successes will seem as mere chaff. We will count all things as loss by comparison (Phil 3:7).

This call to maturity (1 Cor 13:11), to *agape* is, in fact, the way of the Cross – the way of selfless abandon – of Mary, who chose the *better part*, sitting at Jesus' feet. It is the way of the *Great Commandment* over the *Great Commission*, of *devotion* over *production*, and of *intimacy* over *activity*. It is the Shulamite lost in her beloved—in the realisation that, "*I am my beloved's, and that his desire is for me.*" (S of S 7:10). It is all about him.

Our identity is no longer tethered to task or title. It is, exclusively, in our union with him. We are no longer authenticated by the work of our hands – by our ministry or success – but only by the Father.

This *more excellent way* is foolishness to men, but the wisdom of God to the mature. It is concealed from the wise and spiritually prideful:

Yet we do speak wisdom among those who are mature; a wisdom, however, not of this age nor of the rulers of this age, who are passing away; but we speak God's wisdom in a mystery, the hidden wisdom which God predestined before the ages to our glory; the wisdom which none of the rulers of this age has understood;

for if they had understood it they would not have crucified the Lord of glory; but just as it is written,

'Things which eye has not seen and ear has not heard, and which have not entered the heart of man, all that God has prepared for those who love him.'

For to us God revealed them through the Spirit; for the Spirit searches all things, even the depths of God.

1 Corinthians 2:6-10 NASB

There is another way—an alternative to the ways of men in the church. However, it is not accessible to all. The secrets of the kingdom are given to some, but hidden from others:

You have been given knowledge about the secrets of the kingdom of heaven, but it hasn't been given to them.

Matthew 13:11 Author paraphrase

The Father reveals the kingdom only to the humble in heart:

At that very time He rejoiced greatly in the Holy Spirit, and said, 'I praise You, O Father, Lord of heaven and earth, that You have hidden these things from the wise and intelligent and have revealed them to infants. Yes, Father, for this way was well-pleasing in Your sight.'

Luke 10:21 NASB

If we are to see the fullness of the kingdom, there is no alternative. We must humble ourselves under God's mighty hand, yielding those things we hold dear: our reputations and ministries, our abilities and successes—in fact, our very motivation for living.

It is time for us to be aligned exclusively to the one who made himself of no reputation – the servant-King – and embrace the *more excellent way*.

May the kingdom come!

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