

Receiving the Kingdom

Our recent readings of Jeremiah's Prophecy reveals the extent to which Israel had lapsed into gross idolatry and immorality. Today's reading of Jeremiah 36 epitomises this: a message was given to the nation via Yahweh's Prophet warning of coming judgments, yet they refused to hear. Of those who initially heard the word, it is written, "...when they had heard all the words, *they were afraid*, both one and another, and said to Baruch, We will surely tell the king of all these words" (Jer. 36:16). It is written through another prophet: "... to this man will I look, even to him that is poor and of a contrite spirit, *and trembleth at my word...*" (Isa. 66:2). These men demonstrated this acceptable spirit, and considered the matter to be an issue of national importance, to which the king should also give heed. The king, however, was of an altogether different spirit. He had the Word read out before him, yet having only read three or four leaves, "he cut it with the penknife, and cast it into the fire that was on the hearth, until all the roll was consumed on the hearth ... *yet they were not afraid*, neither the king, nor any of his servants that heard all these words" (Jer. 36:23-24).

In these events, we have illustrated that great enmity which exists between man and God: the ways of the flesh against the spirit. Time and time again throughout history, the revelation of God has been considered too damaging for the vested interests of the hierarchy. From the rulers who, like Jehoiakim, sought to destroy the Word, having Bibles burned, to the false prophets who seek to obscure it's meaning by the production of a plethora of translations, and the presentation of a false message; the flesh has always been in antipathy to the things of the Spirit. Here is the root reason identified by Scripture: "yet they were not afraid". This is the natural man: fearless in the belief that he will not be called upon to give account of himself. As the Apostle testified elsewhere: "... the way of peace have they not known: there is no fear of God before their eyes" (Rom. 3:18). The natural man cannot receive the things of the spirit of God because they are spiritually discerned, and so they blunder forwards in their blindness until they – and their followers – trip and fall into the ditch.

The prophet himself, however, displayed a very different spirit. Whilst cleaning out the Temple at the instigation of king Josiah, a copy of the Word was found: "Hilkiah the High Priest said unto Shaphan the scribe, I have found the book of the Law in the house of Yahweh" (Jer. 22:8). How tragic it was that the written Word was lost in the very place which should have epitomised holiness and sanctification! The Nation had all but lost the Word, such were the depths of apostasy into which it had sunk. Hilkiah, it would appear, was Jeremiah's father (Jer. 1:1), who would therefore have ready access to the book. This is how Jeremiah referred to the situation:

"Thy words were found, and I did eat them; and thy word was unto me the joy and rejoicing of mine heart: for I am called by thy name, O Yahweh Elohim of Armies" (Jer. 15:16).

Like Paul the Apostle, Jeremiah delighted in the Law of God (Rom. 7:22), eagerly partaking of them as a hungry man devours his food. "I did eat them" was his testimony, his spiritual senses delighting in the experience. Indeed, the Psalmist exhorts us to do likewise: "O taste, and see that Yahweh is good: blessed [Heb. "happy"] is the man who trusteth in him" (Psa. 34:9).

This passage from Psalm 34 is cited by Peter, as he was moved by the Spirit to add a further revelation:

“As newborn babes, desire the unadulterated milk of the word, that ye may grow thereby:
If so be ye have *tasted that the Lord is gracious ...*” (1 Pet. 2:2).

Here, the exhortation is for the man of the Spirit to humble himself, and partake of the spiritual nutrition that the Word is able to impart, as children to the mother’s breast. Laying aside all prejudice and fleshly wisdom, he simply drinks that which the Lord has provided for him, to meet his needs.

Our New Testament reading from Mark chapter 10 recounts the Master’s teaching in a similar vein:

“ ... suffer the little children to come unto me, and forbid them not: for of such is the kingdom of God. Verily I say unto you, Whosoever shall not receive the kingdom of God *as a little child*, he shall not enter therein” (Mark. 10:14-15; cp. Lu. 18:17).

The characteristic of children in terms of their learning, and trust towards their parent is something to be developed within those who become begotten by the Word, having Yahweh as their Father.

King Solomon recognised this, and it is most edifying to consider his example. Verse 5 describes how Yahweh appeared to Solomon, and said to him: “Ask what I shall give thee”. How much would men of the flesh delight in such an offer! Ask whatever you will, what you desire to have! Solomon however, was a man who delighted in spiritual things, and recognised his position before Almighty God. “... O Yahweh my God, thou hast made thy servant king instead of David my Father: and I *am but a little child*: I know not how to go out or come in ...” (1 Kings 3:7). Fearing before the God of his Father David, Solomon trusted in the promises made concerning him. He recognised the extent of mercy that he had been appointed a king over all Yahweh’s people, and his desire was for the things of the kingdom, for the good of the people. Unlike a natural child approaching his natural Father, Solomon asked for nothing for himself in terms of material things: “give therefore thy servant an understanding heart to judge thy people, that I may discern between good and bad: for who is able to judge this thy so great a people?” (1 Kings 3:9).

Seeking first the affairs of the Kingdom, all other things that he had not asked were given to him:

“God said unto him, Because thou hast asked this thing, and hast not asked for thyself long life; neither hast asked riches for thyself, nor hast asked the life of thine enemies; but hast asked for thyself understanding to discern judgment: Behold, I have done according to thy words: lo, I have given thee a wise and an understanding heart; so that there was none like thee before thee, neither after thee shall any arise like unto thee. *And I have also given thee that which thou hast not asked*, both riches and honour so that there shall not be any among the kings like unto thee all thy days ...” (1 Kings 3:11-13)

This would appear to be echoed by our Master, Jesus the Christ, in Matthew chapter 6. In speaking of the way in which lilies of the field have glory in their appearance, Christ alluded to Solomon and his unasked glory: “even Solomon in all his glory was not arrayed like one of these” (Mat. 6:29). He then proceeds to command his disciples: “but seek ye first the kingdom of God, and his righteousness, and all these things shall be added unto you” (Mat. 6:33). Here is the example of Solomon – an example speaking of greater things to come. Like a child, Solomon sought for wisdom to administer in the Kingdom, and all else was given him also. We seek the kingdom of our Father (Mat. 13:43), trusting that all else that we need will be given to us, trusting in the words of Messiah which follows: “Take therefore no thought for the morrow: for the morrow shall take thought for the things of itself ...” (Mat. 6:34).

Though it is a fundamental truth that believers in Christ ought develop, grow, and mature as time goes by in their walk towards the kingdom, it is also a truth that certain child-like qualities should remain. This is what the Apostle teaches:

“Brethren, be not children in understanding; howbeit in malice be ye children, but in understanding be men” (1 Cor. 14:20).

Like Solomon, we are to seek, and grow in wisdom, but in terms of the development of a malicious and destructive spirit, we are to be as little children, being educated in better things.

We saw earlier how that in the days of Josiah, the Word was found, and “eaten” by Jeremiah, the high priest’s son. Josiah also humbled himself before it, and his example is also an exhortation for us to consider:

“and it came to pass, when the king had heard the words of the book of the law, that he rent his clothes ...” (2 Kings 22:11).

Having rent his clothes, he sought after the word of Yahweh through a prophetess by the name of Huldah. She commended his approach to that word thus:

“Because *thine heart was tender, and thou hast humbled thyself* before Yahweh, when thou heardest what I spake against this place, and against the inhabitants thereof, that they should become a desolation and a curse, and hast rent thy clothes, and wept before me: I also have heard thee, saith Yahweh. Behold therefore, I will gather thee unto thy fathers, and thou shalt be gathered to thy grave in peace; and thine eyes shall not see all the evil which I will bring upon this place. And they brought the king word again” (2 Kings 22:19-20).

So it was that because of his penitent attitude and humility of mind, Josiah would not experience the terrible judgments to come upon the people.

Having heard the Word, Josiah showed himself to be a man of activity. 2 Kings 23 recounts how he sought to purge the nation of idolatry, and re-establish the temple worship ordained of old. Verse 2 describes how he read out the words of Yahweh to the people, “both small and great”, and verse 3 describes how he “made a covenant before Yahweh ... to perform the words of this covenant that were written in this book. And all the people stood to the covenant” (2 Kings 23:2-3). Josiah thus established a Law that the people would serve their God in the appointed way. Again, we read that:

“the king commanded all the people, saying, Keep the Passover unto Yahweh your God, as it is written in the book of this covenant. Surely there was not holden such a Passover from the days of the judges that judged Israel, nor in all the days of the kings of Israel, nor of the kings of Judah ...” (2 Kings 23:21-22)

And yet again, we read:

“And like unto him was there no king before him, that turned to Yahweh with all his heart, and with all his soul, and with all his might, according to all the Law of Moses; neither after him arose there any like unto him” (2 Kings 23:25).

Truly, Josiah was a great and a righteous king. He commanded that the newly discovered book must lay the foundation for the nations' development. He commanded that such a great Passover be kept, so great as had not been kept before, since the days of the judges. But righteousness cannot be legislated for: true righteousness is from the heart, not by simply obeying the Law. So it was that after Josiah had left the scene, the nations slumped back into what is arguably one of the darkest days of apostasy, under the reign of Zedekiah.

We noted earlier that the Word was lost to the nation, even being lost in the Temple itself. But once it was found, it was sought for by men of the Spirit. There is a pattern here, followed in the ministry of our Lord. Speaking of Zaccheus, Jesus said, "This day is salvation come to this house, forasmuch as he also is a son of Abraham. For the Son of Man is come *to seek and to save that which was lost*" (Luke 19:10)

As a shepherd, Christ sought the lost sheep of Israel, seeking to turn their hearts back to the ways of their Father. "of them which thou gavest me, have I lost none" (Jno. 18:9) was his own testimony. For those whose hearts are in the House of God, they are not lost, but found by the Great Shepherd that loves all of his sheep, to the extent of laying down his life for them.

Again, the parable of Luke 15 reads: "what woman, having ten pieces of silver, if she lose one piece, doth not light a lamp, and sweep the house, and seek diligently till she find it?" (Lu. 15:8). Notice the point here, that the silver was not lost outside, it was in "the house", to be sought for diligently. Can it be said of our own ecclesia that the Word is lost within it? Not in terms of the physical presence of Bibles. Getting hold of a copy of the Bible is perhaps easier now than in any other age – but finding men and women willing to accept what the Bible teaches; that is another matter entirely. Whilst not having lost copies of Scripture in our ecclesias, the meaning of what Scripture plainly teaches is seldom understood, let alone acted upon. Let it not be lost as a consequence of brethren and sisters looking to commentaries, and some of the more "modern" translations for their understanding. Being impotent to save, they can only hinder a knowledge of the Truth. Those who seek diligently for a correct understanding of the Gospel that saves, will surely find it, according to the wisdom and purpose of God.

In considering the various ways that men react to the written word, we must not neglect to mention our approach to the Lord Jesus Christ. John 1:14 describes him thus: "the Word was made flesh," which means that we ought to seek instruction from him, as from the written Word. He is the bread of life, sent to nourish his followers in Spiritual things. He taught: "I am the living bread which came down from heaven: if any man eat of this bread, he shall live forever, and the bread that I will give is my flesh, which I will give for the life of the world" (Jno 6:51).

We come each Sunday to memorialise our absent Master by eating of some bread and some wine. Truly in these things, we taste and we see that the Lord is good! It was in the abundance of His Mercy that an arm of salvation has been extended towards those who would grasp it, and be lifted out of the mire of humanity. Not belonging to this world, we do not seek the things of this world, but rather the principles by which Messiah's future kingdom will be founded. Let us in our sweet remembrance, consider our own need to give attendance to the doctrine, searching the Word, or more accurately, searching the teachings of the Word. We desire to be present when an even greater Passover will be kept, and when Israel's kingdom shall extend across the globe. We must therefore give attention to the Word, for it only contains the words of eternal life.

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