

## **ANTICIPATION**

Luke 4:14-30

*Malkuth ha shamayim*. Say it with me, *malkuth ha shamayim*. (I have no idea how to really pronounce it.) What does this Hebrew phrase mean? It is somewhat difficult to translate, but the idea is “‘the sole sovereignty of God,’ the recognition that God alone has the right to rule and dominate the life and affairs...of the world. This was a fundamental tenet of Judaism, based on...the first commandment to Moses at Sinai: ‘[Y]ou shall have no other gods before m’ (Exodus 20:3).”<sup>1</sup> This idea, that God alone is sovereign, carried at least three meanings in the Old Testament: (1) God as king of the universe. (Psalm 47 – “Clap your hands, all you nations; shout to God with cries of joy. How awesome is the Lord Most High, the great King over all the earth!...For God is the King of all the earth...God reigns over the nations...for the kings of the earth belong to God; He is greatly exalted.”) (2) God as the sole king of Israel. (Isaiah 41:21 – “‘Present your case,’ says the Lord. ‘Set forth your arguments,’ says Jacob’s King.”) (3) God as king in the future sense. (Psalm 146:10 – “The Lord reigns forever, your God, O Zion, for all generations.”)

The fact that God alone was to reign is why Israel refused to bow to earthly kings, being forced into bondage. It is why they hesitated in having their own king—relying on “judges” instead. (The judges were “freedom fighters.”) *Malkuth ha shamayim* is also why Samuel reacted so harshly when the people did ask for a king. The bible says, “But when they said, ‘Give us a king to lead us,’ this displeased Samuel;

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<sup>1</sup> Obery M. Hendricks, Jr. 2006. *The Politics of Jesus*. New York: Doubleday (19).

so he prayed to the Lord. And the Lord said to him: ‘Listen to all that the people are saying to you; it is not you they have rejected, but they have rejected Me as their king.’”

Outside of King David, and one or two others, all of Israel’s kings were failures. Life did not go well for the nation of Israel when they were ruled by an earthly king. The Old Testament ends with Israel being non-existent and Judah in bondage in Babylon.<sup>2</sup> For this reason, much of the Old Testament prophecies had to do with the coming of *Mashiach* (“Messiah” – the “anointed one”). The most famous of these prophecies was from Isaiah 61:1-2 – “The Spirit of the Sovereign Lord is on me, because the Lord has **anointed** me to preach good news to the poor. He has sent me to bind up the brokenhearted, to proclaim the year of the Lord’s favor.”

During the 400 year period (known as the “silent years”) between the events of the Old Testament and the beginning of the events in the New Testament, an anticipation that the Messiah was soon coming started to gain momentum, along with the belief that when He did come, He would overthrow the Jewish oppressors and reestablish the throne of David. Thus, the Messiah would be a political redeemer—the ultimate “freedom fighter”—that would bring with Him *malkuth ha shamayim*.

One example of this is the rebellion known as the Maccabean Revolt. In about 167 B.C., the Greek occupiers issued an edict that all Jews recognize Antiochus IV (the Roman Emperor) as *Epiphanes* (meaning “God manifest”), swearing allegiance to him. When soldiers entered a small village to enforce the orders, an outraged Jewish peasant named Mattathias invoked *malkuth ha shamayim*, saying, “Even if all the nations that live under the rule of the king obey him...abandoning the religion of their

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<sup>2</sup> Sometime after the reign of King David, the nation of Israel split in two with ten tribes going to the North, becoming Israel, and two tribes going to South, becoming Judah.

ancestors...[w]e will not obey the king's words."<sup>3</sup> After his death, Matthathias' son, Judas Maccabeus, led the Guerilla War and reconsecrated the Temple in Jerusalem. The Jewish festival of Hanukkah (which means "rededication") celebrates this victory. As time went on, the expectation that the Messiah would soon come reached a fever pitch.

Now, fast forward to the day Jesus walked into His hometown synagogue, was handed the scroll of the prophet Isaiah, and asked to read. The passage for that day was Isaiah's prophecy about the coming Messiah. The people would know this prophecy by heart. Just reading it would bring excitement. Jesus would be "preaching to the choir." This was everyone's favorite passage. So Jesus read, "The Spirit of the Lord is on me, because he has anointed me to preach the good news to the poor. He has sent me to proclaim freedom for the prisoners and recovery of sight for the blind, to release the oppressed, to proclaim the year of the Lord's favor."<sup>4</sup>

Then Jesus did something totally unexpected. Dramatically, He rolled the scroll up, handed it back to the attendant, sat down, and said, "Today this scripture is fulfilled in your hearing."<sup>5</sup>

How did the people, who were anticipating God sending His Messiah react? Were they excited? Did they embrace Jesus' words? Did they applaud? Were they ready to give up everything and follow Him? NO! The Bible says, "All the people in the synagogue were furious when they heard this. They got up, drove Him out of the town,

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<sup>3</sup> 1 Maccabees 2:19, 22. Much of the information preceding footnote #3 is from *The Politics of Jesus*, pp. 19-21.

<sup>4</sup> Luke 4:18-19.

<sup>5</sup> Luke 4:21.

and took Him to the brow of the hill on which the town was built, in order to throw Him down the cliff.”<sup>6</sup>

Anticipation, expectation; then when God does move, rejection and disappointment. Allow me to stop and ask two questions (with several sub-questions) by way of application:

**Question #1 – *What are you anticipating God to do?***

Are you anticipating anything? Do you live your life with the reality that God is still active and involved in the affairs of men? Do you believe He wants to be involved in your personal affairs? Do you anticipate that God love you and will take care of you? Are you anticipating good things? Are you an optimist or a pessimist? Do you live with an expectation that, once again, Jesus is going to break into the world, and it could happen at any moment? What are you anticipating God to do?

**Question #2 – *How would you react, if God did what you anticipated, but not like you expected?***

Would you be disappointed? Would you embrace Him? Would you reject Him?

The reason most people rejected Jesus as the Messiah is not because they were not anticipating a Messiah, but because the Messiah they got, was not what they expected. Do you see God in the coincidences that happen in your life? Do you pray for God to do something, and then not recognize (or worse—reject) what He does?

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<sup>6</sup> Luke 4:28-29.

Allow me one more question:

**Question #3 – In your anticipation of what you are expecting God to do, are you missing what He is already doing?**

God is at work at all times, all around you. Even when He seems quiet, He is still actively engaged in what is going on. Elijah illustrates this point.

Elijah was depressed. He had anticipated and expected God to do one thing, but God had not yet “come through” for him. He was having a crisis of faith. God tells him to go and stand on a mountain because He was about to pass by him.

As Elijah stands on the mountain “a great and powerful wind tore the mountains apart and shattered the rocks...*but the Lord was not in the wind*. After the wind there was an earthquake, *but the Lord was not in the earthquake*. After the earthquake came a fire, *but the Lord was not in the fire*.<sup>7</sup> Earth, wind, and fire. Three elements that make up ever pagan religion. To the pagan, earth, wind, and fire represented God.

Elijah anticipated and expected that when God showed up He would put on a big display of power and force so no one would miss Him. Instead, after the storm the earthquake and the fire, “came a gentle whisper,”<sup>8</sup> and there was God, in the whisper.<sup>9</sup> There was God, doing what Elijah anticipated, but not what he expected.

## Back to the Story

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<sup>7</sup> 1 Kings 19:11-12.

<sup>8</sup> 1 Kings 19:12.

<sup>9</sup> 1 Kings 19:13.

*Malkuth ha shamayim*; the sole sovereignty of God. By the time of Jesus, there was a great anticipation that God's Messiah was going to break into the world and reestablish the throne of David. Jesus announced that He was the Messiah when He read Isaiah's prophecy in His hometown Synagogue. The people reacted by wanting to throw Him off a cliff.

The Messiah (God's anointed one) would announce his entrance into the world by proclaiming, "*Malkuth ha shamayim*"; and Jesus did not do that, or did He?

Remember when I said the phrase *malkuth ha shamayim* was difficult to translate? The idea behind the phrase is the sole sovereignty of God. But among the Jews, leading up to the time of Christ, the phrase came to mean ***the kingdom of God***, or, ***the kingdom of heaven***. And Jesus loudly proclaimed, "The kingdom of God is near."<sup>10</sup> The *idea* behind the word "near" is "at hand" or "approaching." Jesus was announcing that the Messiah had arrived, and with His arrival came *malkuth ha shamayim*, the sole sovereignty of God, the kingdom of Heaven.

All of Jesus' teachings, all of His healings, and all of His miracles, were demonstrations that God's kingdom is now a present reality. And when He left this world, He gave all of His authority to bring in the kingdom of God, and to demonstrate the present reality of God's kingdom, to His followers. Jesus said, "I tell you the truth, anyone who has faith in Me will do what I have been doing. He will do even greater things than these, because I am going to My Father."<sup>11</sup> In other words, wherever Jesus' followers are, there the kingdom of God is at hand. If you are a follower of Jesus Christ, wherever you go, you take the kingdom of God with you—at work, at home, at school, in

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<sup>10</sup> Mark 1:15.

<sup>11</sup> John 14:12.

the community. At times, God's kingdom shows up in the spectacular and supernatural things occur—healings, miracles, restorations. But at other times, His kingdom shows up in the silence...and supernatural things occur—forgiveness, peace, encouragement.

## **CONCLUSION**

For the last year or so, I have been doing a lot of thinking about the kingdom of God—what it means, what are the implications, etc... I want to take a few weeks and try and flesh some of my thoughts out. I am not exactly sure where I am headed, but I am convinced the reason we don't see more of God in our society, and in our churches, is because we have been looking in the wrong place. Like the religious people of Jesus' day, Jesus has announced God's kingdom, and we have missed it because we have been anticipating something else.

Tonight has been an introduction to the Old Testament background of Jesus' announcement that He was the Messiah sent to usher in God's kingdom. What we need to do tonight is have our passports stamped so we can enter God's kingdom. And how is that done?

Jesus tells us how to become citizens of the kingdom of God. He says, "repent and believe."<sup>12</sup> We need to repent because we have been trying to build our own kingdoms. We need to repent because we have tried to colonize Jesus into our kingdom instead of crossing over the boarder into His. We need to repent because we have been illegal immigrants in God's kingdom. We have entered by our own rules, and have tried to take advantage of all the privilege without sharing the responsibility. We

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<sup>12</sup> Mark 1;15.

believe Jesus is coming when what we need to do is live like He is already here. We need to repent because we have not believed in the present reality of His kingdom. Instead of transforming our world, we have tried to endure our world, or conform to our world, because we know that one day—in the future—there's a better day coming. Jesus said the better day coming is already here and available to all who will repent and believe.

We are going to repent by reminding ourselves of the sacrifice Jesus made to bring God's kingdom to us. It is through the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ that we have *malkuth ha shamayim*.