

# Jesus 2: more “kingdom” parables

# Our conclusions so far:

- The “kingdom of God” more strictly means “God’s sovereignty”. (Note, this is not a question of *interpretation*, but of good *translation*.)
- The question is, what does “God’s sovereignty” refer to?

# Options:

- “God’s sovereignty” refers to a **government by God** which will be set up (by Jesus?) here on earth in the future. This is the *apocalyptic* reading of the concept.
- “God’s sovereignty” refers to the **afterlife**.

# Philosophical reading:

- “God’s sovereignty” refers to the **rule by God over a person’s soul** (or mind).
- On this reading, when Jesus tries to explain “what God’s sovereignty is like”, he is in effect trying to explain what it is like to be subject to God’s will; to be ruled by God; to submit to God.

# Ethical reading:

- God's sov. plausibly refers, at least some of the time, to some form of **wisdom**, especially **ethical wisdom**.
- Hence the claim that a rich man cannot "enter God's sov." This seems very similar to the idea expressed elsewhere that **rich people cannot serve God**, in the (intuitive and readily intelligible) sense that people devoted to money cannot easily be *righteous*.

# Overview of this reading:

- God's sovereignty refers to
- (a) the state of being subject to God's will
- (b) a kind of **wisdom**, identical with that state of being under God's will.
- (c) **righteousness**, identical with that state and that kind of wisdom.

# Growth parables:

- God's sov. is like a **grain of mustard** (it grows into something large and useful).
- God's sov. is like **yeast in dough** (it is unseen, but makes the bread grow into something edible and useful).
- God's sov. is like **a man planting grain**; unseen it develops into a crop, which can be harvested. (It slowly, and unseen, develops into something useful).

This seems to support the **philosophical** reading over the **apocalyptic** and **eschatological** readings.

**Wisdom** is something that **grows**, develops within a person, **unseen** (inside a person's soul), then **produces results** (good actions), which are **useful** (to others) and can be "harvested" (by God, in the sense that he **expects us to produce those results**; that is what he wants from us.

# Remember Epictetus:

Fruit grows thus: the seed must be **buried** for some time, **hid**, grow **slowly** in order that it may come to perfection.

Let the root **grow**, then acquire the first joint, then the second, and then the third: in this way, then, the **grain** will naturally force itself out.

# Meaning...

For who that is pregnant and filled with such great **principles** [i.e., philosophical and ethical principles] does not also perceive his own powers and move toward the corresponding **actions**?

By contrast it is very hard to make sense of the claim that

The **future government by God** *grows slowly into something that produces results.* OR

The **afterlife** grows slowly, unseen, and then produces goods.

# Another kingdom parable:

**The kingdom of heaven is like treasure hidden in a field, which someone found and hid; then in his joy he goes and sells all that he has and buys that field.**

**Matthew 13.44**

# And another

**Again, the kingdom of heaven is like a merchant in search of fine pearls; on finding one pearl of great value, he went and sold all that he had and bought it.**

**Matthew 13.46**

# The suggestion:

The sovereignty of God is something of immense and supreme value, and what's more, it is something that causes us to give up everything else that we place value on, so that we can have it, keep it, be in it, etc.

**Does this sound familiar?**

# A controversy: two versions of a fish parable

Thomas 8:

. And he said, "The person is like a wise fisherman who cast his net into the sea and drew it up from the sea full of little fish. Among them the wise fisherman discovered a fine large fish. He threw all the little fish back into the sea, and easily chose the large fish. Anyone here with two good ears had better listen!"

# Revised text?

. **The wise person...OR...**

**The kingdom of God** is like a wise fisherman who cast his net into the sea and drew it up from the sea full of little fish. Among them the wise fisherman discovered a fine large fish. He threw all the little fish back into the sea, and easily chose the large fish. Anyone here with two good ears had better listen!"

# Matthew 13.47

47"Once again, the kingdom of heaven is like a net that was let down into the lake and caught all kinds of fish. When it was full, the fishermen pulled it up on the shore. Then they sat down and collected the good fish in baskets, but threw the bad away.

# Matthew explains...

This is how it will be at the end of the age. The angels will come and separate the wicked from the righteous and throw them into the fiery furnace, where there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth.

# Can we choose between them?

**Thomas:** man pulls up net full of fish; finds one big fish; keeps the big fish and throws back the little fish.

**Matthew:** men pull up net full of fish; separate good fish from bad fish; throw away bad fish. That is to say, bad people will burn in hell at the end of time.

# Questions

- Which fish parable fits better with the pearl and treasure?
- What are bad fish?
- Do fishermen throw away bad fish?
- What is a good fish?
- Do fishermen throw away small fish?
- Do they keep big fish?
- When they throw fish away, what happens to the fish?
- When they keep fish, what happens to the fish?

# More general questions:

- Does Jesus know what will happen to people at the end of time?
- Might he think that he knows?
- What does the Thomas version mean?
- Might Jesus think that he knows the value of being subject to God's will?
- Does he elsewhere express views on the latter?

# Conclusion:

A parable describing **the supreme value of God's sovereignty** has apparently been changed (in Matthew's version) into an apocalyptic saying.

The apocalyptic version of the saying is therefore almost certainly spurious.