

“The Kingdom of God Cometh Not With Observation”

By Elder David Pyles

When Jesus said the Kingdom of God does not come with observation, His meaning was that it does not come with an impressive, outward show. By “kingdom of God” He obviously did not mean Heaven. While inexperienced Bible readers are apt to begin with this assumption, they soon learn that something else must usually be meant by the term. In general, it means all places where God is honored as King, whether in Heaven or on Earth, but it generally refers to the latter, especially in the form of the church. Now it is in this earthly form that it does not come with observation. It may in many respects be visible, but not in ways that are impressive to the eye when judged by criteria that are commonly important to humans. If anyone doubts the importance of this principle, then let them consider that the greatest miscalculation in human history derived from the same error.

The Jewish people had been taught to expect a Messiah. In this they were correct. They were also generally correct in some specifics concerning him, including his family lineage, place of birth, etc. But they were not at all expecting a man who would be unimpressive when judged by typical human standards. The most unexpected aspect of all was His crucifixion. As Paul said, **“But we preach Christ crucified, unto the Jews a stumblingblock,”** (1Cor 1:23). There was no problem in preaching to them of a Messiah or Christ provided it comported with their preconceived notions as to who he was and what he should be, but a crucified Christ was so contrary to their expectations that they spontaneously rejected such claims. His crucifixion remains a problem for them to this day. Most would say the Jews erred in expecting too much in this. The truth is they were expecting far too little. They have been debilitated by the error ever since. However, one can be sure that the error derives from a problem that is not unique to them.

There is no greater bane on the human race than its sensation for the superficial and its tendency to be blinded on this account to what is truly meaningful and real. In one of the most outstanding prophecies of all time, and 800 years before the event, Isaiah gave a description of Christ (Isa 53) as detailed as anything ever written about Him after the fact. But Isaiah prefaced his prophecy with the despairing words, **“Who hath believed our report?”** He realized that a large percentage of people, especially among the Jews, would reject what had been revealed to him. The prophet then explained that the man seen in his vision was not at all what most people would expect of the greatest person who would ever grace the planet. Much less would they expect it of incarnate God. Now the truth is that Jesus Christ was exactly what should have been expected and wanted of anyone who took the time and trouble to think. The problem is that not many people are disposed to think at meaningful depth, particularly in matters of religion.

It evidently did not occur to many of the Jews of old that if God were to walk in their midst, He was not apt to do it in the form of a rich, powerful man impressively adorned in a robe and crown. These things, while being important to humans, mean absolutely nothing to the Architect of the Universe. Gold and silver are no more to Him than common dirt is to us. The best of our apparel is but rags to him. A man aspiring to riches, fame and power would seek to be adorned in the most impressive manner and be very selective of the company he kept, but it is a hasty assumption that such rules would apply to Almighty God. Reason dictates that quite the opposite would be the case. In particular, we could expect Him to be merciful to those held in contempt as sinners by others. To Him all men are sinful. Social and racial distinctions would also be meaningless. All men, regardless of race or social standing, appear to Him as poor, weak, fallible and unaccomplished. He would not dismiss children on account of their simplicity. To Him all humans are simple. He would not dismiss women on account of their weakness. To Him all humans are weak.

Further, while we could expect great miracles from Him, we should expect feats of a practical nature and not done for the mere purpose of show. This is because He is in no need of man's approval. He is no better off if we accept Him. He is no worse off if we do not. By believing on Him, we can only help ourselves. Accordingly, He would exhibit consummate confidence, void of any confusion, uncertainty, anxiety or fear. The past, present and future are all firmly in His knowledge and control. This would include a complete knowledge of the hearts of all men around Him, and we could also reasonably expect the state of the heart to be very important to Him. All men instinctively know from their youth that with God it is the heart that counts.

Now anyone who has read of Jesus Christ, as described by those who personally knew Him, will readily recognize that what we have here said is an exact description of who He was. To a thinking man, He was exactly what should have been expected and wanted of incarnate God, but Isaiah was acutely aware that humans are far more apt to judge things by superficial criteria than true and meaningful substance. God has challenged man in this respect from the times of the beautiful, forbidden fruit in Eden, but that challenge reaches its very climax in the form of Jesus Christ. As is the challenge with respect to the King, so also is the challenge with respect to His Kingdom. As is the human failure in expectation of the King, so also is the human failure in expectation of His Kingdom. It is for this reason that He warned us that "the kingdom of God cometh not with observation."

The challenge is not only a test of human intellect, but is especially a test of human vanity and pride. A man cannot come to a reasonable assessment of the Kingdom without a reasonable assessment of the King, and he cannot come to a reasonable assessment of the King without a reasonable assessment of himself. True religion is largely built on two fundamental questions. **The first is: Who am I? The second is: Who is Jesus Christ?** Men are fond of pretending that the second question is the greater issue, but the first question is where the battle of mind and

heart is really fought. When the first question is answered properly, the answer to the second will not be far behind. Jesus Christ will make very little sense to a man who has a deluded, prideful assessment of himself. He will be very sensible to man who has come to grips with reality. This will explain why common and poor people have always been more disposed to believe on Jesus than those at the top of society. A man who is rich, educated or highly honored has an advantage over the common man in almost every other respect, but he is disadvantaged in this one crucial regard. The favor life has conferred upon him easily distracts his mind from some facts about himself that are difficult enough for even poor men to properly appreciate.

Who am I? It is a remarkable thing that, while humans have a multitude of religious views, and commonly have sufficient conviction to kill for them, they do in fact unanimously agree on the answer to this fundamental question. Indeed, on this point even intellectual atheists can join fellowship with the most ignorant, superstitious heathens. The answer of all men will be: "I am someone God would surely consider to be important, if in fact He exists." It is clear that even Atheists believe this because of their unrelenting emphasis on the so-called "problem of evil." This argument says that if God exists, then surely He would favor us with lives free of trouble and wrongdoing; therefore, since we have trouble and suffer wrong, it is concluded God cannot exist. This reasoning is obviously predicated upon the belief that: "I am someone God would surely consider to be important, if in fact He exists." This statement, though assumed by all men, is laughably egocentric on the very face of it to anyone who cares to think. God's existence has nothing to do with His opinion of men or His care for them. These are separate issues. The fact that even highly educated men commit this error shows that infidelity has its roots in pride and emotion rather than true logic. Infidels may claim their position derives from reason, but the truth is that the matter is far more personal than they would like to admit.

When referring to doubters and unbelievers, Jesus had an interesting habit of describing them as being "offended." For example, the new believer represented by the shallow, stony ground in the Parable of the Sower did soon neglect the word sown in his heart because he became offended upon encountering tribulations and persecutions (Mt 13:18-23). At first thought, words like "discouraged" or "disillusioned" might seem a better fit to this statement, but be sure that something will be lost if any word of the divinely inspired text is changed. The new believer, having no depth of root, becomes offended at his troubles because he had naively expected better. This then translates to doubts. He may seek to justify these doubts by logic and science, but they do in fact originate from a personal grievance. Speaking of the last days Jesus said, "And then shall many be offended..." (Mt 24:10), which will explain why there are so many infidels in the modern world, with nearly all of them complaining that a god, if he existed, would not allow them to endure so much trouble and evil. Again, the Lord warned his disciples about persecutions to come, and stated, "***These things have I spoken unto you, that ye should not be offended,***" (Jn 16:1). When John the Baptist sent messengers to Jesus seeking reassurance that He was in fact the Christ, in His reply the Lord stated, "***And blessed is he, whosoever shall not***

be offended in me,” (Lk 7:23). This surely is not a plea for condescension and mercy. Rather, it is a statement of the fact that such a man has been blessed to overcome the superficial and to grasp what is truly substantial. Finally, on the night of His abduction, Jesus said to His disciples, *“All ye shall be offended because of me this night: for it is written, I will smite the shepherd, and the sheep shall be scattered,”* (Mk 14:27). Since the King was offensive to the carnal reasoning of man, it is reasonable to suppose that His Kingdom could be the same.

All these statements show that unbelief and rejection commonly begin when unreasonable and vain expectations are disappointed. People are offended when they receive less than they expect, especially when they perceive it to be less than what they deserve. When they conclude from such there is no God, their ability to reason objectively has been obstructed by pride and emotion. They do not consider that their infidelity derives from an assumed premise that is itself in dire need of proof, and which, in absence of such proof, is really a dubious proposition. Why should a god, if he existed, consider us important, and why should he have any care whatsoever for our welfare? Such ideas should be dismissed as merely wishful thinking unless there is convincing evidence to support them. The need for such evidence becomes especially apparent when one considers there is much that could be construed as implying quite the opposite.

Scientific discovery never diminishes our concept of God. It only increases it. The simplistic and demeaning notions of God entertained by ancient men now appear ridiculous in light of all we have learned. While these men are not to be excused for their ignorance, some allowance must be made for the fact they had no way of knowing the incomprehensible vastness of His Universe, the unsearchable brilliance He implemented with the creation of life, the wonders of His physical laws, the complexities woven into the fabric of the earth, etc. Whether we peer through an improved telescope or an improved microscope, the conclusions are always the same: The organization, complexity and footprints of brilliant design are found to be greater than what we formerly perceived them to be. Then we must consider that even if we fully comprehended all we observed, we could not know that it even approached the full potential of the creative force behind it. God is at least as great as the Universe implies Him to be. He could in fact be immeasurably greater. It is a formidable evidence of inspiration that ancient biblical writers presented a much higher view of God than any of their contemporaries. Yet even in the Bible itself, one will detect a growing concept of God as they travel from Genesis to Revelation. This was unavoidable, and part of a process which will ever characterize the progress of human understanding, whether in this world or the next. *“Of the increase of his government and peace there shall be no end...”* (Isa 9:7).

But these facts surely do not comfort us in our struggle with the question: *“Who am I?”* As science accumulates evidence of God’s greatness, the less plausible becomes the idea that He would consider mere humans to be of any importance. Estimates of the size of the Universe have increased to the point that some have it as much as 150 billion light years across. This

would mean that if a whole map of it were stretched over an acre of land, the dot on the map corresponding to the earth would need to be magnified a trillion, trillion times to even be the size of an atom. It takes the best of our instrumentation to even see an atom. Detecting a thing that is less than a septillionth the size of an atom is incomprehensible to us. It is a gross exaggeration to even describe us as mere “specks” in the overall context of what God has created.

But our insignificance does not stop at this. Our bodies are composed mostly of water. Once this is removed, one will be left a few shovels of dirt, which will be composed almost entirely of common and near-worthless elements, such as oxygen, carbon, hydrogen, etc. The scrap value of the human body is mere pocket change. Consider also our transience and frailty. Notwithstanding the recent search for inhabitable planets, and notwithstanding the fact this search is presently leading to the discovery of numerous planets each month, not a single place has been found in the Universe that would accommodate our vulnerable bodies other than the small globe upon which we stand. Indeed, it is ironic that many humans do not believe in a hell. Every part of the known Universe is an effective hell except for the Earth. The Sun is hell. Mercury is hell. Mars is hell, etc. All of the recently discovered planets are hells. All of the stars are hells. Any man upon travelling to any of these places would be almost instantly dead upon arrival, and even upon the Earth will he be dead soon enough.

These observations are without consideration to man’s righteousness or unrighteousness. It would be fanciful to suppose God sees humans to be of any real importance even if they were righteous. Much less could one suppose this if men were judged to be unrighteous rebels. No doubt the common supposition that God cares for us derives in part from our own paternal instinct. If we bring a life into existence, then we instinctively have care and compassion for it. This instinct was surely instilled in us by our Creator, who presumably replicated it from Himself. But we care for babies because we see in them miniature, harmless and innocent versions of ourselves. If the midwife had handed us an ill-tempered, scaly monster with elliptical eyes, then our reaction would have been very different. So of all the thoughts and delusions men are fond of entertaining, the idea that God should consider them important is no doubt the most fanciful and egocentric of them all. The pride of man is the only plausible explanation as to why both Theists and Atheists readily make this assumption without seriously questioning its merit. It is not a thing to be taken as axiomatic. It is in desperate need of proof. A religion that merely assumes the existence of God or the greatness of His power still leaves this crucial question unanswered. It offers no hope and no practical reason for worship. On this account, such a religion is truly irrelevant. Infidel scientists, bent on doing anything else, have done more to prove the existence and greatness of God than the sum-total of all religionists. Therefore, when the relevance of any religion is to be assessed, the most crucial question will be whether the religion proves that God cares about man or whether it merely assumes it. The vast majority of religions do the latter, meaning that those religions offer nothing beyond what we could have easily concluded without them. It would also follow that if such religions are willing

to ground the most crucial of all issues on mere wishful thinking, then nothing would deter them from doing the same on issues of far less importance. When a man has put pride aside, and come to grips with his own insignificance in comparison to the incomprehensible greatness of God, then it becomes apparent that any claim of God caring for man implies an extraordinary degree of willingness on His part to condescend. The opposite would also be true: A willingness on His part to condescend from one who designs, controls and spans the Universe to the lowly state of man would imply an extraordinary degree of care for him. Upon proper appreciation of this crucial fact, Jesus Christ will begin to make sense to a man, and all other alternatives will appear vain and void. Anything short of His own condescension would leave the crucial question in doubt and displace hope with fear. His condescension to the form of a humble man and His acts of compassion and self-sacrifice in behalf of men were no less important than the most spectacular miracles He ever performed. His miracles proved He is God, but His condescension proved that it matters He is God. In absence of this, His Divinity is a mere piece of information that will mean nothing to a man in a grave.

So when the unbelieving Jews disdained Jesus Christ on account of His humble life and ignominious death, they were in fact rejecting the very things they should have revered the most. There is no reasonable basis for hope without them. No doubt many of those Jews were blinded by conceit. They saw no need of the assurances offered by the condescension of Jesus Christ because they assumed their race and nationality were alone sufficient to support the assumption that God cared for them. This is why John the Baptist warned them from the outset against investing too much confidence in the fact they were the seed of Abraham (Mt 3:9). Given the terrible plight of that people since those times, and the fact that God has deprived them of the same superficial glories they demanded of Jesus, and has subjected them to the same humiliation and suffering they rejected in Jesus, God obviously insists that the condescension of Jesus be acknowledged and revered for what it truly is – the very hope of man.

Now it is an unfortunate thing that when men seek out the Kingdom of God, they are very apt to search for the same meaningless vanities which, if found in the King, would have left us without any basis for hope. Huge and extravagant edifices, a gloriously attired clergy sporting impressive titles and degrees, a prominent and affluent laity, huge congregations, etc. are the very things people are apt to seek in a church, but these things are so out of character with the spirit of true Christianity that it would be more reasonable that they draw careful scrutiny instead of unsuspecting adoration. The search for the true Kingdom of God should be guided by:

But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, longsuffering, gentleness, goodness, faith, meekness, temperance: against such there is no law. And they that are Christ's have crucified the flesh with the affections and lusts. If we live in the Spirit, let us also walk in the Spirit. Let us not be desirous of vain glory, provoking one another, envying one another. – Gal 5:22-

The latter part of this verse is especially relevant to our times. Sadly, where churches are found having significant growth, oftentimes a great number of the additions are not new converts to Christ, but former members of other churches who had been coaxed away mostly by “vain glory” and accommodations to the flesh, and by very little having to do with the fruit of the Spirit. Even churches of the same denomination will measure success by their ability to cannibalize each other. In their escalating game to see who can consume the other, money and effort are diverted from true evangelism and charity to finance ever-increasing levels of vain glory. The long run effect of this will be the decline of all churches taken together, both with respect to their integrity and with respect to the size of their membership.

New Testament Christianity, in obedience to its Author, strives to remain focused on what is truly meaningful. For this reason, it is void of those vanities that too often serve as distractions to men. This is one of several respects in which the Old Testament leads us to Christ. When David desired to build for God a glorious temple, the Lord quickly reminded David that He had never commanded any such thing (2Sam 7:7). Nevertheless, the Lord conceded to David, saying He would allow a temple to be built in the days of David’s son. Yet even when Solomon had built the temple, the Lord strictly warned that He would bless it only if the Jews continued in those things He had actually commanded them to do (2Chr 7:19-22). This temple, though spectacular in its glory, almost exactly marked the end of Israel’s ascent and the beginning of its decline. Years later when a second temple had been built, the Disciples of Christ beheld it in adoration, speaking of the greatness of its stones, but Christ disdainfully replied that the whole structure would eventually be torn down (Mt 24:2). The vanities and superficialities of men mean nothing to the Eternal, Omnipotent and Omniscient Savior, and for this reason every Christian should take careful heed to the fact that “the kingdom of God cometh not with observation.”