

THE REIGN OF GOD IN THE SYNOPTIC GOSPELS

A. The meaning of “Reign of God”

1. Mark 1,14f. The totality of the message and ministry of Jesus. God’s gift (invites human response).

Now after John was arrested, Jesus came to Galilee, proclaiming the good news of God, and saying, “The time is fulfilled, and the reign of God has come near; repent, and believe in the good news.”

2. *malkuth* = governing activity of God-the-king
 - “Reign of Heaven” (Matthew)
 - Theophany: God comes as king!
3. Against the “Anti-reign”
4. Jesus’ use of the expression “Reign of God”:
 - Eschatological (not perennial) meaning: The new era is beginning.
 - “Reign of God” designates (a.) God’s royal activity, (b.) its benefits
 - Already present in germ; later, in fullness

B. Programmatic Texts

1. Jesus’ inaugural discourse: Luke 4,16-22. ¿What is the “good news”? ¿Who are “the poor”?
2. Beatitudes: Luke 6,20-26:

**Blessed are you who are poor,
For yours is the reign of God.
Blessed are you who are hungry now,
For you will be filled.
Blessed are you who weep now,
For you will laugh. . . .**

**But woe to you who are rich,
For you have received your consolation.
Woe to you who are full now,
For you will be hungry.
Woe to you who are laughing now.
For you will mourn and weep.**

The *materially* poor: a single group of hungry and afflicted. Three arguments:

a. Semitic parallelism among the beatitudes

b. Luke 7,22 y par.

Jesus answered the, “Go and tell John what you have seen and heard: the blind receive their sight, the lame walk, the lepers are cleansed, the deaf hear, the dead are raised, the poor have good news brought to them.”

c. Fulfilling the Oracles of Consolation (Isaiah 40-66).

- Beatitudes #1 (poor) y #3 (afflicted): Is 61,1s

- Beatitude #2 (hungry): Is 65,13; 61,6s. Cf. Is 49,10.13; 55,1-3; 66,10; 23,18 [In the gospels, cf. the Banquet, Luke 13,29; Matt 8,11; etc.]

- Beatitude #3 (afflicted): Is 49,13; 57,18; 66,12s [in gospels: Luke 2,25; Mark 15,43; Luke 23,51]

Therefore, thus says the Lord GOD:

**My servants shall eat,
but you shall be hungry;
my servants shall drink,
But you shall be thirsty;
my servants shall rejoice,
but you shall be put to shame. (Is 65,13)**

The poor are not happy because they are poor; they are happy because God comes as kind to free them from poverty and hunger and to dry their tears. They are happy because they have hope.

Jesus, the bearer of the good news that God comes as king: Is 52,7; 40,9; 41,27; etc.

C. Old Testament Roots: Yahweh, the just king

1. Yahweh, king in Israel (cf. Jg 8,22s; etc.). Yahweh, just king: Psalms 89,14; 97,2; 99,4; 146

2. The ideal king in the Ancient Middle East

The function of the king in Israel: Ps 72,1-4.7.12-14; cf. Ps 82; Wis 1,1; Jer 22,1-5; etc. The failure of the monarchy project.

3. The Messiah: Is 11,1-9; Jer 23,1-6; Ezek 34

4. Matt 12,15-21

5. The poor of Galilee: *Ptochoi* = *ochloi*

But: ¿Does this fit with the rest of the gospel message?

D. Implications

Q. If the Reign of God is for the poor, are the poor morally better?

A. No. Not necessarily.

Q. Is poverty somehow “meritorious”?

A. No. In the Bible, poverty is something bad, never meritorious.

Q. Does the Reign of God just mean bread for the hungry?

A. No. Poverty is not first of all a lack of good but a social relation, oppression. Salvation, too, is a matter of social relations. Compare *sedeq*, *mishpat*, *shalom*. God takes the side of the poor.

Q. Is there something wrong about laughing? Being full?

A. No. God-the-king rejects the social relation of oppression

Q. Does God hate the rich?

A. No. God loves both the rich and the poor, because they are human. But God takes the side of the poor who suffer injustice.

Q. Is the Reign of God also for the *unjust* poor?

A. God does not take the side of the poor because they are good but because God is good and the poor are suffering. God is like a mother whose older child abuses the younger. She takes the side of the victims. The beatitudes of Luke are not about the dispositions of Christians but about the dispositions of God. God takes the side of the worker in the factory when his boss abuses him, but God takes the side of his wife in the home when he abuses her. This means that God demands *conversion* of everyone. The Reign of God means *new persons in a new community*. God becomes present as the *offer* of liberation from sin and for communion.

E. The Inclusive Community

We only comprehend the message of Jesus when we grasp its social meaning: a new people of God for the new era. A truly human community. The Reign of God means new social relations.

1. The poor

2. Sinners. Luke 15,1s; Matt 21,28-32; etc.

The truly surprising option for a society divided into “righteous” and sinners.

Jesus welcomes sinners *before* they repent. The kingdom is *grace*.
Ritual impurity: Be a patriot, wash your hands. The priorities of the
dominant “priestly” theology.

3. The sick (lepers) and the possessed. Sickness no longer implies guilt: Jn 9,2s; Lc 13,3-5. Healing reestablishes participation in the community.
4. Women. Luke 7,36-50; 13,10-17; etc. Widows, Luke 7,11-17; 20,47; etc. The prohibition of divorce: Matt 19,3-9 and par.; cf. Matt 5,27-28.
5. Children (looked down upon in antiquity). Mark 9,36-37.
6. Gentiles, Samaritans.

F. The New Family. Mark 10,29s (cf. 41-44); Matt 23,8ss; 12,46-50; 1 Pet 4,17; 1 Tim 3,15; Heb 3,6; 10,21; cf. Gal 6,10; 2Co 6,18.

G. Versus the Anti-reign: The new community *threatens* the old, and vice versa.

The great reversal. Of rich and poor: Luke 1,52-53; Luke 6,20-26; 16,19-31. The humbled and the exalted: Luke 2,34; 14,11; 18,14. The first and the last: Matt 19,30; 20,16; etc.

But, . . . was Jesus mistaken? The meaning and importance of “faith” and the lack of it in the church.

Bibliography

Dean Brackley, *Divine Revolution: Salvation and Liberation in Christian Thought*. Maryknoll, N.Y.: Orbis, 1996, chapter 6, “Jesus and the Reign of God.”