



December 4, 2020

## Declaring the Limitless Kingdom of God

*Others were tortured, not accepting deliverance, that they might obtain a better resurrection. Still others had trial of mockings and scourgings, yes, and of chains and imprisonment. They were stoned, they were sawn in two, were tempted, were slain with the sword. They wandered about in sheepskins and goatskins, being destitute, afflicted, tormented—of whom the world was not worthy. They wandered in deserts and mountains, in dens and caves of the earth. - (Hebrews 11:35–38)*

The author concludes the famous chapter on faith in Hebrews 11 with these words, after cataloging the great heroes of the Old Testament and their various achievements. We may not think these are very encouraging words. So what's going on here? Is this supposed to boost one's faith? Yes, and in just this way: because of the nature of God and his kingdom, all his created beings and everyone who trusts in him are in a position to say, "Let the worst happen! Let the worst happen, and God and I will go on together in the abundance of his being."

You may say, "If they kill me, who is going to take care of my children?" One of the great martyrs of the Christian church in years gone by, Dr. Rowland Taylor, passed his wife and children on the way to the pyre upon which he was going to be burned. The night before he had written, "God careth for sparrows and for the very hair of our heads. I have ever found him more faithful and favorable than any father or husband." As he passed his family for the final time he said, "Farewell, my dear wife; be of good comfort, for I am quiet in my conscience. God shall stir up a father for my children." He was testifying to God's ability to provide everything we need—no matter what.

We have spoken of the sufficiency of God, that God is all around us, that God is love, that God is a social God who creates persons and a kingdom and sustains them. Jesus is a manifestation of that glorious reality. One of the great prophecies of the Old Testament is found in Micah 5:2: "But you, Bethlehem Ephrathah, though you are little among the thousands of Judah, yet out of you shall come forth to Me the One to be Ruler in Israel, Whose goings forth are from of old, from everlasting."

**Practice:** *Notice the relative insignificance of Bethlehem. It is one of the little clans of Judah, and yet it is from here that the Messiah was to come. This is in keeping with Jesus' teaching about the last being first and the first being last and is primarily a declaration of the limitless kingdom of God. This is why Jesus could pronounce as blessed those who are the religious outsiders, those who are poor, those who are hungry, those who mourn, and those who are persecuted. It is because, in spite of their circumstances, they are living in vital communion with the Shepherd and his kingdom, and they know no lack.*

*(Q) What are the circumstances of your life that you view as unbleisable? How is God lovingly seeking you in this situation, and seeking your good? How can you experience the abundant provision of God and his kingdom as he scatters seeds of new possibilities into an otherwise hopeless situation?*