The Prince of Peace

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After the victory of Persia over Babylon and the return of the Jewish nation from the exile, the expectation of God's final victory through his messiah became prominent. The Deuteronomic ethic which taught that God rewarded the righteous and punished the wicked in this life had largely given way to the apocalyptic world view which looked for justice at God's hand only in the world to come. According to this apocalyptic view, the wicked reigned in the present world, but God would intervene in history to bring about decisive judgment upon the wicked and exalt the righteous at the end of times. The belief that justice and the full exercise of God's sovereignty would break into the present world coalesced with the prophetic vision of messiah as warrior who would initiate the end of time by a bloody and final, military victory. The messianic expectation took many forms among the Jewish people in late antiquity, but the largest part of the people yearned for the glory of Israel during the time of David. They awaited the decisive military victory at the hands of the Messiah ben Judah, a descendant of the royal house of David. This expectation is expressed in the Palestinian Targum on Genesis 49:10:

> How beautiful is the king, the messiah, who will arise from those who are of the house of Judah! He girds up his loins and goes forth and orders the battle array against his enemies and slays the kings along with their overlords, and no kingly overlord can stand before him: he reddens the mountains with the blood of their slain, his clothing is dipped in blood like a winepress.

As part of the *'Amidah* repeated in the daily Jewish devotion along with the *Sh'ma',* the cry to God was for deliverance by a decisive show of force and power: "Consider our suffering and fight our cause, and redeem us quickly for the sake of thy

name, for Thou art a powerful Redeemer. Blessed art Thou, 0 Lord, the Redeemer of Israel." (Seventh Benediction of the *Seder 'Avodat Yisrael)*. To many in and around Jerusalem near the end of the first century B.C.E., the times appeared ripe for the fulfillment of the prophecy uttered by Zechariah: "Behold, the day of the Lord cometh, and the spoils shall be divided in thy midst. Behold, I will gather all the nations against Jerusalem to battle, and the city shall be taken and the houses despoiled by weaponry, and the women ravished, and half of the city will go into captivity, but the residue of the people shall not be cut off from the city. Then shall the Lord go forth and fight against those nations as when He fighteth in the day of battle." (Zech. 14:1-3).

The times were difficult and seemed to many to cry out for violent revolution against the Roman oppressors who ruled the Promised Land. The precedent for such military revolt had been established only a century before when the Maccabeans had revolted against the Greek conquerors of Palestine. In 167 B.C.E., the Hellenistic rulers had attempted to stifle the Jewish religious observance by forbidding worship and the observance of the Torah, and finally by desecrating the Temple. Appealing to their tradition of holy war and a newfound sense of Jewish nationalism, the Maccabeans were able to marshal the faithful Jews to route the Greeks in a series of bloody battles that had secured political sovereignty for the Jews for over one hundred years. In 63 B.C.E., the Romans had conquered Palestine and the Jews were once again oppressed by a foreign power, an unjust and corrupt military regime that desired nothing more than to obliterate Jewish religion and nationalism. The Romans exacted heavy taxes and reinstituted slavery under Herod the Great. The vast arsenals and strength of the Roman Empire

made it impossible to imagine a military victory without intervention of the warrior messiah.

In such circumstances, it is not surprising that the question of violent revolution was one of the primary questions facing the Jewish people - and the advent of the expected military messiah was the burning religious issue of the day. There was no shortage of messianic claimants to lead the insurrection. Armed rebellion had been incited against the Roman oppressors on three different occasions following the death of Herod the Great, and each rebellion was led by a different messianic claimant. Anyone claiming to be the messiah meant trouble for the Romans. The Romans viewed a claim to be the messiah as a claim of treason against the Roman rulers, a crime punishable by crucifixion. The Jewish people also began to suspect anyone who would make messianic claims in the face of disaster after bloody disaster in which the hope of the messiah meant only defeat and death for those seeking liberation.

Various sects and parties had arisen in this ferment of political dynamite, and the Zealots were the chief advocates of violent overthrow. The Zealots mixed their intense nationalism with the popular religious expectation for final victory at the end of the then current era of sinful rule. They took the apocalyptic view with full seriousness. Unlike the Sadducees who preferred to compromise with the Roman rulers, the Zealots insisted on violent revolt by guerrilla warfare and terrorism. They felt that any means of overthrow was justified by the end of liberation, at any cost. They felt that God must surely oppose the Romans and would reward their religious fervor and commitment to the chosen people with military victory in the present world and a great reward in the world to come. The Zealots emerged about 6 C.E. in an attempt to incite a popular

uprising. The only way to usher in the new era was to provoke the predicted bloodbath in which God would be obliged to intervene according to prophecy. Though the uprising was averted, the Zealots continued to operate around Jerusalem and demanded a similar response from all who could be considered righteous. Theirs was a religion of force and war aided by God. Sadly, the Zealots foolish military resolve eventually led to the destruction of Jerusalem. It was the revolt of the Zealots in 70 C.E. that forced the Romans to destroy Jerusalem.

The Essenes and the Qumran covenanters preferred retreat to the desert to await the advent of the new age. Their plan was to usher in the new era by their greater righteousness and observance of the law apart from the corrupted Jews in Jerusalem. Their wait was to be peaceful until the advent of the messiah, but the War Scroll found at Qumran demonstrates that they expected to join the messiah in battle when he came in glorious and decisive victory over the oppressors: "[T]here shall be mighty combat and carnage in the presence of the God of Israel, for that is the day which He appointed of old for the final battle against the Sons of Darkness. Thereon the company of the divine and the congregation of the human shall engage side by side in combat and carnage, the Sons of Light doing battle against the Sons of Darkness with a show of godlike might" (1, 12-15 in Gaster, 400). The Qumran covenanters gave a messianic interpretation to Isaiah 11:1-4 which demonstrates their expectation of a royal messiah who would bring final military victory at the end of time: "[The reference is to the Zion of] David who will exercise his office at the end [of days]. His [ene]mies [will be felled], but him will God uphold....[H]e shall bear sway over all the hea[th]en, and Magog [shall be vanquished by Him], and his sword shall wreak judgment upon all the peoples" (Gaster 307). The

people at Qumran felt that the end of the present era and the beginning of the new era governed by God was not far off, for the separatist community had been established for the very purpose of preparing the way in the wilderness for the coming of the new age spoken of by Isaiah when Israel would be restored (1QS 9:19-21). Only they constituted the holy remnant, the little flock which God had chosen, for they exulted: “we - we are Thy Holy People" (War Scroll xiv, 15: Gaster 418).

The ruling class Sadducees were not attempting to usher in the new age: they wanted to preserve their wealth and status in the present one. They cherished their wealth accumulated from a monopoly on sales of animals at the temple and from offerings. The corrupt clan of Annas monopolized the office of High Priest and wanted to preserve their power by compromising with the Romans. The scholarly Pharisees who take a beating in the later writings of the Church represented in the New Testament did not wield the influence and power that is attributed to them in the Gospels, but they too were looking for a compromise that would preserve their lifestyle and luxury. The political question was thus whether to violently overthrow the oppressors or to accommodate the Romans and preserve what wealth and power one could enjoy. It apparently had not occurred to Jews of the first century that they had presented themselves with a false dichotomy of political options which was enshrined also in their religious expectation: either the new age or the old age, either the present political order or violent overthrow, either us or them.

Amid this political strife and religious division, a truly revolutionary escape from the false dilemma appeared in the person of Jesus of Nazareth, whose influence was so tremendous and insight so great that the term God would be expanded to refer to him in

later memory. Our vision of Jesus of Nazareth is inherited and mediated though the eyes and experience of the later Church that formed in response to his message. His message was so unexpected that even his disciples could not understand what he offered - a theme especially prominent in the Gospel of Mark. It is also the interpretation through categories of understanding of these disciples who had been raised in the culture of religious expectation and political turmoil that we find utilized in the New Testament to make sense of Jesus. Our view of Jesus is therefore incomplete and colored by the perception of the disciples, infected by later recognition being read back into their experience of the earthly Jesus, Looking back on the life of Jesus of Nazareth from the optic of the disciples' post-resurrection experiences allows us to see what *they* regarded as the true meaning of his sayings, and gives us the advantage of their insights realized upon extended reflection upon their experience of Jesus. The records left us in the gospels are not historical biographies, but constitute religious testimony of the true meaning of history as it culminated and reached new meaning in the life of Jesus of Nazareth. The import of the gospels is sufficiently complex that a review of their reliability and compilation is warranted.

The Sources: The gospels of the New Testament which are the chief source for understanding Jesus' teachings were constructed many years after Jesus' death. The gospel of Mark was written before Matthew and Luke, a point easily deduced from the fact that both Luke and Matthew rely on Mark as a source but develop the Markan material differently - sometimes even tacitly disagreeing with the Markan interpretation of various passages. The fact that Matthew and Luke interpret Mark differently is significant, for it means that there was a diversity of tradition and interpretation about

Jesus in the early Church. It also demonstrates that Matthew and Luke were composed independently from one another. Mark was written circa 60 C.E., probably in Rome (Raymond E. Brown and John P. Meier. Antioch and Rome. New York: Paulist Press, 1983: 191-97).

Matthew and Luke also quote from another common source, usually identified by showing that Luke and Matthew have about 200 verses which show striking similarities or are identical and which are presented in almost identical order, but which are not found in Mark. This common source is usually denoted "Q" (from the German *Quelle* which means "source") and consists primarily of a collection of sayings which appears to go back to the words of the earthly Jesus, for the passion and resurrection are not found in the Q material (P1. Hoffman, Studien zur Theoloqie der Loqienouel1e, Munster 1972). The Q Source is generally regarded as a more reliable guide to Jesus' teachings than parables and episodes which are presented by only one of the synoptic gospels. The material not in common among the gospels, but appearing only in one or other of the Synoptics, consists largely of independent traditions or oral tradition that grew up around the memory of Jesus and the experiences of those who were with him and who felt that Jesus continued with them even after his violent death. We will show a common scholarly preference for material appearing in the Q source for the purpose of understanding Jesus' message and self-understanding. The gospel of Matthew was written sometime between 80 and 90 C.E., probably in or around Antioch (Brown, Antioch. 51-57). The gospel of Luke was reduced to writing about 85 C.E., and was written as a two part salvation history with Acts to demonstrate the spread of Christianity from Palestine to Rome (Leonard Goppelt. Theology of the New Testament. Grand

Rapids: Eerdman's, 1982, 269). Each of the Synoptics, Matthew, Mark and Luke, relies on material composed earlier, but we have them only seen through the eyes of the later writers of the gospels.

The gospel of John presents an altogether different situation. Except for the passion narrative, it has very little in common with the synoptic gospels. The gospel of John places Jesus' ministry almost entirely in Jerusalem whereas the Synoptics have Jesus entering Jerusalem but once. The Synoptics have Jesus' death take place on Passover day while John had the death on Passover eve - John is probably more accurate here! (Raymond E. Brown. The Gospel According to John I-X11. New York: 1985. XLII-LI). Jesus constantly speaks of the kingdom of God (Luke and Mark) or the kingdom of heaven (Matthew) in the Synoptics, but the phrase fall from his lips only once in John. Instead of the kingdom, John speaks of eternal life as the goal for Christians. Jesus probably spoke the language of the Synoptics. The thought world of John is very different from the Synoptics. In the Synoptics Jesus demands repentance to prepare for the immanent kingdom of God: John demands rebirth as a metaphor for repentance or change of life (Compare Jn.3:3/Mt. 18.:3). The gospel of John speaks the language of the desert sects common to the Essenes and Qumran community whereas the Synoptics speak the language of Palestinian Judaism (Leonard Goppelt. Theology of the New Testament: The ministry of Jesus and Its Significance, Grand Rapids 1981, 14-17; and essays in James H. Charlesworth and Raymond Brown (eds). John and Qumran. London, 1972). John is generally not reliable as a history of Jesus of Nazareth, though some specific passages may go back to a more reliable tradition than the Synoptics. John is, even more than the Synoptics, an interpreter of the meaning of Jesus' actions and words. The gospel

of John is presented as a revelation .which discloses the true meaning of Jesus' ministry in its fullest symbolic significance. If Jesus eats, it is the bread of life. If he hears the wind, it is a lesson about the way the spirit works. If he offers a Samaritan woman water, it is from the well of eternal life. John's Gospel reveals more than meets the eye, and he clearly saw in Jesus more than those who walked with him during his life.

It should be obvious from our treatment of the sources that we will not present a fundamentalist view of Jesus - a view which is dishonest history and bad theology. Sensitivity to the inherent problems of historical assessment is crucial to a responsible evaluation of the message and meaning of Jesus. There are valuable nuances of interpretation that give us a deeper insight into the meaning of Jesus for the writers of the gospels. The gospels are not accurate history and, with the possible exception of Luke, were not meant to be. The gospels show us what the disciples found to be most valuable in Jesus' message. The expectation of the immanent kingdom of God is prominent in what the disciples understood of Jesus' message, but the view of the messiah which he presented and Jesus' answers to the political and religious dilemmas facing those in his day were revolutionary (in the sense of totally new and daring, not of military insurrection) and unexpected. Though the messages of the gospels are clearly presented in the idiom and within the cultural horizon of first century Christianity, the life of Jesus transcended his culture and times and created hope that still offers us totally unexpected solutions in the nuclear era.

The Kingdom of God: It has long been recognized by scholars that the kingdom of God and its establishment were the focal point of Jesus' message. The emphasis upon the kingdom is especially prominent in Q and the Markan source material. The Synoptics

present Jesus calling persons not primarily to accept belief in a set of doctrines or allegiance to ecclesiastical authority, but to repentance in preparation for the kingdom of God which was, for Jesus, "at hand." Nevertheless, there is no scholarly consensus as to just what was Jesus' conception of the kingdom of God *(besileie tou theou)*. While all agree that the kingdom denotes God's rule in some way, it is unclear whether Jesus thought of the kingdom as the sovereign rule of God that would be established at the end of the present world or whether Jesus conceived of a kingdom that was being realized on earth in his ministry and was somehow already present in Jesus' ministry even before the apocalyptic conflagration. Many scholars follow Albert Schweitzer and Rudolph Bultmann in interpreting Jesus to teach that "God will suddenly put an end to the world and to history ... Jesus expected that this would take place soon, in the immediate future" (Bultmann, Theology of the New Testament. New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1955, 12-13). This interpretation of Jesus' message is premised on the popular Jewish eschatological expectation (the belief that the end of the world was coming soon as predicted) and upon primary sayings of Jesus.

In the early saying tradition of Q (Lk. 19:9/Mt. 10.7) and in the redacted summaries of Jesus' words (Mk. 1:7/Mt. 4:17), Jesus is represented as saying that "the kingdom has drawn near" *(engiken he basiliea tou theou)*. The clear burden of his message was that the "time is fulfilled, and the Kingdom of God is at hand; repent, and believe the gospel" (Mt. 4:17/Mk. 1:7). Jesus taught, like John the Baptist, that people must repent in light of the nearness of the kingdom of God. (W. G. Kummel, Promise and Fulfillment: The Eschatolooical Message of Jesus. Studies in Biblical Theology 23, 1961, 35). The Baptist recognized Jesus as the "Sent One" who would initiate the

judgment which was to be rendered at the advent of the kingdom of God. John the Baptist offered to those who sought him out in the desert a chance to prepare for the kingdom through repentance *(metancia)* and ritual purification that would cleanse sins, and thereby provided a way to escape the pending catastrophe that would accompany the coming of the kingdom (Schi1lebeeckx, Jesus: An Experiment in Christology. New York: Crossroad Publishers Co. 1981. 134-35). The necessity of repentance, of a total transformation of life that would change its orientation from the present world to the kingdom, was urgent because God would come in judgment, and all who had not repented would find everlasting punishment rather than blissful existence in the kingdom (Mt. 3:7-8/Lk. 3:7-9). By submitting to John's baptism for the remission of sins, Jesus certainly saw John's call to baptism as the proper way to prepare for entry into the kingdom of God. Jesus regarded John's baptism as "being from heaven" (Lk. 20:4). It should not be inferred from Jesus' acceptance of John's baptism, however, that he placed his stamp on the apocalyptic conflagration that John preached. John's message did not demand commitment and faith in his person, nor did John see the kingdom realized in his baptisms. Above all, John taught of a judgment to be avoided while Jesus taught of a goal to be sought, valuable above all else that competed for human attention and commitment.

The moment of baptism was clearly understood as a moment of theophany and self-revelation for Jesus. The theophany announcing Jesus as the Son of God constitutes an early tradition that Jesus may very well have intimated to his disciples. The voice declaring, in the language of the Psalms, "this is my beloved Son," was not heard by those present. It is clear that the populace wasn't aware of Jesus' adoption as the beloved

Son and equally clear that the disciples did not understand the significance of Jesus message and death until after his death (Mt. 17:22-23/Lk. 9:43b-45/Mk. 9:31-32). Even John was unaware of the divine disclosure of Sonship, evidenced by the well attested passage which has John later sending his disciples to enquire whether Jesus is the "one that should come," i.e., John wanted to know if Jesus was the expected apocalyptic prophet sent by God (Mt. 11:3/Lk. 7:20).

Jesus claims and self-understanding must begin, insofar as it is possible to grasp what he believed about himself at all, from the revelation following his baptism. The revelation of the Holy Spirit as a dove was enshrined in the apostle's teaching as the gift of the Holy Ghost following baptism for all Christians (Acts. 3:12). The anointing was the metaphorical sign of the gift of the spirit - an anointed one of course was a messiah, though not *the* messiah. The most important clue to Jesus' insight gained from his encounter with John is the designation of Jesus as the "coming one" and the "sent one" (Lk. 3:17/Mt. 3:11). Thus, John recognized Jesus not as the Son of God, son of David, or San of Man, but as the decisive figure who would initiate the kingdom with fiery judgment: "there cometh one mightier than I after me, whose shoes I am not worthy to bear ... whose fan is in his hand, and he will thoroughly purge his floor, and gather his wheat into the garner; but he will burn up the chaff with unquenchable fire" (Mt. 3:11-12/Lk:3:16-17). Only the Son of Man figure in Dan 7:11 who comes in authority from God to judge corresponds to anything like John's "expected one" in intertestamental Jewish literature (Schi1lebeeckx, 132). In Daniel, the judicial figure who represented God *as* God would come in fiery judgment to initiate the kingdom of God which was cut out of the mountain without hands (Matthew Black, Throne Theophany). Jesus' entire

ministry centered on repentance and the kingdom of God, and his teachings about himself all bear the indelible stamp of the experience following his baptism by John and acknowledged by the Father.

We shall return to the theme of eschatological judge of Israel when discussing the Son of Man figure and the claims Jesus made about himself, but it is important to realize that Jesus may have assumed some measure of the messiah figure, as the one anointed with the gift and authority of the spirit, and as the Son of Man figure who initiated judgment, without adopting whole-cloth the notions then popularly associated with such figures - instead he was the "sent one," the one mightier than the Baptist. The baptism is the moment from which Jesus understands his call by God. The baptism narrative, especially clear in Mark, is in the form of the Old Testament prophetic call genre - a form announcing the prophet's commission from God to take a message to the public (Zimmerli, Ezechiel). Jesus' call and endowment with the spirit, like that of Ezekiel (Ezek. 1:1-2:5), endowed him with a peculiar understanding of what God wanted him to accomplish and, most importantly, made him aware that he must drop everything else in life and proclaim the news of the kingdom which was drawing near (Goppelt, 41).

According to the Lukean special source, Jesus opened his public ministry in his home town at the daily devotion in the synagogue. Jesus had apparently just returned to the place where he grew up as a boy after being away for some time. Jesus had already encountered John the Baptist and spent time alone in spiritual preparation for his ministry. The gospels say he repaired to the desert for the purpose of being tempted of the devil. Undoubtedly, the time of preparation was one of turmoil and self doubt. Behind the story of the tempting lies the question that he would put to those he

encountered during his ministry - could he leave the glory of this world and devote his entire heart, might, mind and strength to the kingdom of God? Hebrews 5:7-8 reports: "In the days when he was in the flesh, he offered prayers and supplications with cries and tears to God.... Son though he was, he 1earned obedience from what he suffered" (trans. Raymond Brown, A Crucified Christ in Passion Week. Liturgical Press, Collegville, 19B6, 17). Can it be doubted that Jesus himself faced the decisive question he would put to those whom he challenged to give up all for the kingdom? Jesus' decisive call to "follow" him derived from his own experience of the call received at baptism and heard again in the wilderness to drop everything and seek the kingdom of God.

The daily devotion in the synagogue would forever set him apart as the one sent to bring about the kingdom of God. After the reading of the *She'pach* it was common to allow a member of the community to read from the law and prophets and then offer a short commentary. Jesus offered a reading of his own choosing from the prophets. He opened the text to Isaiah and read a passage which would have had overt messianic implications for those in attendance:

> The Spirit of the Lord is upon me; because the Lord hath anointed me to preach the good tidings unto the meek; he hath sent me to bind up the brokenhearted, to proclaim liberty to the captives, and the opening of the prison to them that are bound;
>
> To proclaim the acceptable year of the Lord, and the day of vengeance of our God; to comfort all that mourn;
>
> To appoint unto them that mourn in Zion to give unto them beauty for ashes, the oil of joy for mourning, the garment of praise for the spirit of heaviness; that they might be called trees of righteousness, the planting of the Lord, the he might be glorified (Isa. 61:1-3).

Luke then records that Jesus closed the book, returned it to the rabbi, sat down and, while "the eyes of all" were "fastened upon him," he announced that the Kingdom of God was upon them in his fulfillment of the messianic prophecy: "This day is this

scripture fulfilled in your ears" (Lk. 4:16-21). The effect upon Jesus' hearers was powerful and predictable. He had delivered an astounding message. The spirit was upon *him*, apparently referring to his call at the baptism and the authority bestowed by the spirit to preach. Those in attendance at the daily devotional took offense and rejected the challenge he had placed before them. Could the little boy they knew as the carpenter's son have really offered what they all hoped for? This wasn't the messiah they expected. Instead of victory and deliverance from their oppressors, he offered good tidings to the meek and brokenhearted. He had come not to declare a kingdom of decisive military victory, but to proclaim liberty to those who were burdened by poverty, blindness and injustice. The influence of Jesus' experience at the baptism pervades his message, but he announced a different kingdom than John had taught. Jesus' message was centered on the good news of God's reign to the meek and poor, to proclaim the coming judgment of God's kingdom which was the present and ultimate hope for the outcast and oppressed.

The initiation of Jesus' ministry, reported only in Luke, perfectly illustrates the purpose and message of Jesus' ministry. Matthew also implies that Jesus made a preliminary visit to Nazareth before commencing his work at Capernaum (Mt. 4:13), and all of the gospels initiate Jesus' public ministry with the announcement that mirrored the Baptist's own teachings: "the time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God is at hand: repent ye, and believe the gospel" (Mt. 4:17/Mk. 1:15). Unlike the Baptist's message, however, Jesus' message was a proclamation of joy and good news. Jesus regarded what he taught as cause for rejoicing, for the deliverance of the oppressed and outcast was at hand. Jesus clearly understood that he had been called to "preach the kingdom" and bring about its realization on earth in his healings and exorcisms. Mark reported that Jesus insisted that

he was the one sent to preach the kingdom: "And he said to [his disciples], Let us go into the next towns, that I may preach there also: for therefore came I forth. And he preached in their synagogues throughout all Galilee, and cast out devils." Matthew and Luke emphasize different aspects of Mark's report. Matthew highlights the activities which made the kingdom of heaven present in Jesus' ministry: "And Jesus went about all Galilee, teaching in their synagogues, and preaching the gospel of the kingdom, and healing all manner of sickness and all manner of disease among the people" (Mt. 4:23). Luke, on the other hand, emphasizes Jesus' understanding of the message God had called him to preach: "And he said unto them, I must preach the kingdom of God to other cities also, for am I sent for that purpose" (Lk. 4:43).

Early in his ministry, Jesus appears to have believed that the kingdom of God would appear within the lifetime of his disciples: "I say unto you, that there be some that stand here, which shall not taste of death, till they have seen the kingdom of God come with power" (Mt. 16:28/Mk. 9:1/Lk. 9:27; Cf., Mk. 13:30). Indeed, Matthew reports that when Jesus sends his disciples to spread his message, he instructs them: "preach as you go, saying, 'the kingdom of heaven is at hand'.... I say unto you, you will not have gone through all the towns of Israel before the Son of Man comes" (Mt. 10:7, 23b). Scholars following Bultmann have interpreted Jesus from the perspective of the decisive end of the world which he expected before the disciples returned from their mission, at the very least before one generation had passed. The issue is not, however, *when* Jesus expected the kingdom, but *what was the nature* of the kingdom that Jesus expected? It is clear that the kingdom was not only close, but was, in some sense, realized during Jesus' lifetime in his ministry.

The Q source represents Jesus as responding to the question of the Baptist: are you the sent one? Jesus answered indirectly, "Go and tell John what you hear and see: the blind receive their sight and lame walk, lepers are cleansed and the deaf hear, and the dead are raised up, and the poor have the gospel preached to them" (Mt. 11:5/Lk. 7:22). In other words, all of these actions are signs to John that Jesus is indeed "the sent one," and John's disciples need not wait for the fulfillment of John's prediction that the kingdom is near. He was fulfilling the prediction found at Isaiah 61:1-3 with which he initiated his ministry. Jesus himself characterized his healings as a sign that the kingdom was already breaking into the present world in his ministry. When the Jewish authorities charge Jesus with casting out devils by the power of Satan, Jesus points out the absurdity of Satan working against himself by allowing his own emissaries to be cast by Jesus and tells them in no uncertain terms that if they consider him to cast out devils by the power of God, they must recognize that the kingdom of God is breaking into the present world: "if I cast out devils by the spirit of God, then the kingdom of God is come upon you" (Mt. 12:28/Lk. 11:20). In a saying whose authenticity is almost universally accepted, Jesus declared: "The kingdom of God is not coming with signs to be observed; not will they say ‘Lo, here it is!’ or ‘There!’ for behold the kingdom of God is in your midst" (Mt. 11:6/Lk. 17:21). The Greek phrase over which there has been much discussion, *idou gar basilia tou theou entos hymnon estin*, can be translated to mean that the kingdom of God is within, in the midst of, or all about one (Goppelt, 63). But if Jesus really believed that the kingdom was present while the Jews were still under the political rule of the Romans and the masses labored under injustice, perhaps his view of the kingdom was not the

decisive end of the world expected by his contemporaries and by the later church infected with the apocalyptic worldview.

Jesus apparently saw the judgment that would initiate the separation of the wicked from the righteous at the beginning of the kingdom coming in glory as present in his ministry, indeed in his amazing claim to have authority to forgive sins. When a certain man stricken with "the palsy" was brought to Jesus and lowered in a bed before him for the purpose of healing, Jesus perceived that "their faith" was sufficient that he could heal the sick man. Jesus imparted the wholeness of body and spirit by a gesture pregnant with implications: "Son, thy sins be forgiven thee." (Mt. 9:2/Lk. 5:20/Mk. 2:5). Healings were not uncommon in Jesus' time, but even the faith healers so common in Judea at the time did not claim to heal by forgiving sins. The scribes did not hesitate to charge Jesus with blasphemy, for he had assumed the prerogative to forgive sins that was reserved for God alone. Jesus' reply to the charge of blasphemy is a reliable indication of his self-understanding: "Whether it is easier to say to the sick of the palsy, 'thy sins be forgiven thee;' or to say, 'arise and take up thy bed, and walk?' But that ye may know that the Son of man hath power on earth to forgive sins." (Mt. 9:5-6/Lk. 5:23-24/Mk. 2:9-10). Here Jesus renders judgment as the Son of man and demands faith as the condition to his healing message - a faith that heals both spiritually and physically.

Luke adds another pericope wherein Jesus forgives sins because of the love manifest by the woman who anointed his head: "Wherefore I say unto thee, her sins, which are many, are forgiven; for she loved much: but to whom little is forgiven, the same loveth little." (Lk. 7:46-47). Luke thus emphasized that forgiving of sins is related to a restored relationship marked by repentance. Forgiveness meant that the entire person

became whole and the relation to God is restored through Jesus' forgiving judgment. The kingdom was already present for those who expressed faith in the person of Jesus and manifested that faith by love. The judgment that would initiate the kingdom was already manifest in Jesus who came as the expected Son of man.

It is therefore essential to Jesus' teaching that his disciples would help bring about the kingdom through prayer and forgiving sins on a personal level. Jesus taught his disciples to petition the father for a world that they hoped would be realized in their own lives. They were to pray: "thy kingdom come, thy will be done, on earth as it is in heaven, and forgive us as we forgive." This is no mere petition, but a definition of the nature of the kingdom of God on earth. The kingdom was come whenever and wherever the will of the Father was done on earth as in heaven. The will of the Father was fulfilled in whosoever expressed love and forgiveness. The kingdom was a decisive reality that was yet to come in its decisive fashion regardless of personal preparation, to be sure, but it was a decisive reality that was already realized to the extent human life was transformed by love and forgiveness. E. P. Sanders is thus surely correct in seeing the kingdom as "the reign of God, the 'sphere' (whether geographical, temporal or spiritual) where God exercises his power." (Jesus and Judaism (Phil. 1985, 126). For Jesus, God's sphere of influence was in the here and now as well as in the there and not yet.

Jesus also introduced a new relationship and intimacy in prayer that undoubtedly offended his contemporaries with its sense of familiarity with the Father. Jesus taught his disciples to pray: "Father – *'abba*." He did not use the terms commonly used in prayer 'abi, meaning "my father," or even the usual term used in the prayers of the synagogue addressed to '*abinu*, "our father." As J. Jeremias has shown, Jesus adopted a unique

address used by young children in the intimacy of the family circle to address their own fathers, analogous to the English term "daddy." (Abba. Studien zur neutestamentlichen Theologie und Zeitoeschichte Gottingen 1966). As David Flusser has shown, the use of *Abba* as an address to the Father was also adopted by "wonderworkers" in Jewish history who believed that their intimacy with God allowed them to perform miracles (Jesus Hamburg 1968, 133-36). Jesus was unique in the entire history of Jewish thought, however, in teaching his disciples to pray to '*abba.* He must have been aware of his break with the tradition at the very point of most intense religious expression found in prayer. Jesus offered a new, more intimate relation to the Father that was available to his disciples through him. Far from the impassible and immutable God of the later tradition, the God of Jesus was offered as an intimate father whose entire concern was humankind and involvement with persons in the here and now. For Jesus, the ultimate expression of this concern, of this good news, was the kingdom of God that was already drawing near in intimate re-union with the father. The kingdom was present for those who obtained forgiveness through love that transformed the person from a life in the present order to a life worthy of the kind of life manifested by God. The full understanding of what the kingdom signified for Jesus is expressed well by Edward Schillebeeckx:

> Jesus is the man whose joy and pleasure is God himself. God's lordship is God's mode of being God; and our recognition of that engenders the truly human condition, the salvation of man. For that reason God's lordship, as Jesus understands it, expresses the relation between God and man, in the sense that 'we are each other's happiness.' Ultimately, it is the ancient covenant of love, fellowship with God, in which God nevertheless remains the sovereign partner. Thus anyone having anything to do with Jesus is confronted with the God of Jesus. The one thing that Jesus is getting at is that God is a "God of human kind." (Jesus, p. 142).

The kingdom is the expression of what Jesus found to be most valuable about life, our "ultimate concern" in Tillich's terms. It is the entire hope for the "poor" inhabitants of the world. Jesus faith is hope for a better world that we must strive to realize in the here and now, and the faith that God can make a difference in bringing about that world. The command to love represents the hope for finding that world and escaping the fate that awaits us if we are not prepared for a world where love is not only the norm, but the entire meaning of existence. The love command that knows no bounds is thus at the core of the hope Jesus offered to the world.

The Context of the Enemy-Love Command: The love that the Father manifests for humans is the focus of Jesus' hope for the kingdom to be realized in the lives of his disciples. The radical love that characterizes the divine relationship with humans, that suffers for, because of and with us, is manifest in the command to love even enemies. There is no command more demanding than the request to surrender all self-interest, to literally give all that one is, heart, might, mind and soul, for the benefit of the kingdom by embracing one's enemies. The kingdom is thus the ultimate paradox, where "whosoever will save his life shall lose it; but whosoever will lose his life for [Jesus'] sake will save it." (Mt. 16:26/Lk. 9:24-25/Mk 8:35-37). Jesus presented the hope and challenge of a kingdom where only by foregoing every legal recourse, eliminating every claim against one's neighbor, and by removing every barrier to one's enemy could the meaning of human existence find fulfillment. His purpose was to alter the orientation of each person through repentance and a radical reorientation of values, and thereby to transform society and the world from the old age into a new order and kingdom, to alter the status quo to conform to the behavior and social order as the Father intended it from the time of

creation. Though Jesus cannot consistently be viewed as a political revolutionary, it is clear that he presented a revolution in behavioral demands that went beyond the Law and prophets and criticized the existing social order as unworthy of the kingdom.

Jesus' challenge to bring forth fruits worthy of the kingdom is found primarily in the Great Sermon, reported in Matthew as the Sermon on the Mount and in Luke as the Sermon on the Plain. The extensive similarities between the sermons which present nearly identical sayings in similar order demonstrate that they are probably different reports of the same sermon delivered by the historic Jesus. Yet the sermon fulfills different purposes for Luke and Matthew. The different viewpoints from which Luke and Matthew reflect on the sermon are extremely valuable because they allow us to see the sermon both in the more original context as a critique of the *halakhah*, or interpretation of the Jewish Law, found in Matthew, and in the light of the Gentile appreciation of the gospel as social critique explored in Luke. The message stressed in both gospels converges into a single focal point, however, which reveals the essence of the teachings of the historic Jesus.

Luke's account of the Great Sermon contains none of the technical legal terminology associated with the Law found in the Matthean account. For example, Luke excised all of the statements of the Law from its sermons which contrasted with Jesus' statements regarding the Law regulating conduct for those who would enter the Kingdom of God. Luke's gospel also avoids all legal terminology which might be misunderstood in the gentile context, e.g., (*dexian sou siagona* Mt. 5:39b), "on the right of your cheek;" (*krithenai* Mt. 5:40) "to sue;" (*aggareusei* Mt. 5:41) "shall compel." Luke thus avoided the context of Palestinian Judaism and the Law in which the Great Sermon was originally

given and reinterpreted it for a gentile audience ignorant of the controversy surrounding the interpretation of the Law that preoccupied Jesus. The gospel of Luke demonstrates the power of Jesus' teachings precisely because the true meaning of the Law which Jesus sought to expound in the Sermon transcends cultural and temporal barriers. The point of the gospel of Luke is that such barriers must be broken down in the Kingdom, for the mode of existence in the kingdom is independent of the authority of the Law or any particular cultural mores, but is grounded in a universal ethic reflected in God's conduct. Luke's gospel therefore summarizes the reason for the new ethic that Jesus propounded which is not found in Matthew. One is to love enemies, lend without hoping for any return or personal gain "because [the Father] is kind to those who are unthankful" (Lk. 6:35b).

Luke interprets the sayings presented in the Sermon much more concretely and literally than Matthew. He intends the sayings to apply to a real and present world where injustice and oppression are the norm (Richard Cassidy, Jesus. Politics, and Society, New York 1978, 32). Jesus looked upon his disciples, in contrast to the multitude found in Matthew, and said: "Blessed be you poor: for yours is the kingdom of God." The juxtaposition of blessings for the poor and woes for the rich demonstrate that Luke clearly has in mind those who actually are poor in the fullest prophetic sense. Jesus' sermon has reference to the place of the economically deprived, politically oppressed and socially despised (Sci11ebeeckx, p. 176). The poor, the sorrowful and the hungry are blessed precisely because this world holds no promise for them (Lk. 6:21). Such persons cannot find recourse through the courts or through social prestige, their vision is not distorted by the riches and praise of this world and they can therefore see the present

world for what it is, i.e., a pursuit of a pseudo-value which will decay with the corruption of the created order which human pride and vanity have voluntarily spawned (Lk. 6:22-26). The poor should therefore rejoice and the rich mourn, because only those who are poor as to the world can have an eye single to the glory of God, for there hearts are not set upon this world but upon the kingdom (Lk. 12:32-34). Luke's account of the sermon contains a warning to the rich not found in Matthew's account of the sermon. Luke's Jesus can therefore warn the rich: "Woe unto you that are rich! for ye have received your consolation. Woe unto you that are full! for ye shall hunger. Woe unto you that laugh now! for ye shall mourn and weep." (Lk. 6:24-26) In the kingdom, those that are last shall be first, and the first shall be last (Lk. 13:30).

Luke sees Jesus as heir to the prophets who chastised the oppressors of the poor. His disciples should rejoice because the ruling classes reject them: "your reward is great in heaven, for their fathers rejected the prophets in the same way." (Lk. 6:23). Jesus did not teach a mere reversal of the Deuteronomic ethic where God blesses the righteous with riches and wicked with poverty, nor did he intend merely a reversal of roles where the poor will have it all over the rich in the world to come as in the parable of Lazarus and the rich man (Lk. 16:19-31). The fullest meaning of Jesus sayings, however, is that in this world those things which matter most ultimately are at the mercy of those things which matter least. The kingdom will be very different, for it will be comprised of those whose entire life is centered on what is truly of value - a world where the meaning of existence is found in love for others. The economic norm of this world where relationships are entered only for individual gain and without regard for the well being of the economic partner will be replaced by a system of relationships which finds its whole

meaning in the well-being of others: "Give to every man that asketh of thee; and of him that taketh away thy goods ask them not again." (Lk. 6:30; cf., 6:35). The new order is judged by self interest becoming the measure of interest for others. Jesus did not teach that persons should act against self-interest; rather, one's real interest and meaning is found in regarding others as God loves us. The first two commands thus become the basis of the new law of conduct required by Jesus (Mt. 22:27/Mk. 12:29-30). Luke translates the second command to love others as ourselves into a norm of human conduct that is not found in the Matthean account of the sermon: "as ye would that men should do to you, do ye also to them likewise." (Lk. 6:31).

The key to understanding Jesus' commands relating to ethical conduct is the nature of God, for he demands that humans relate to one and other in the same way and for the same reasons that the Father does. Jesus can therefore demand a love that transcends all economic, social and national boundaries and that goes even beyond the limitations of natural human inclinations to fear and retaliate against enemies: "Instead, love your enemies and do good, and lend without any hope of return. You will have a great reward, and you will be sons of the Most High, for he himself is kind to the ungrateful and wicked. Be merciful as your Father is merciful." (Lk. 7:35). Jesus' entire life is oriented toward overcoming the human institutions that circumscribe our conduct within moral codes that fall short of God's life as norm for us. He therefore ate with the tax collectors and sinners, he demanded that all legal rights recognized by the nation-state be ignored, and he forgave his enemies. God's love renders all such norms obsolete and inadequate. What Jesus offered is not an economic or political system, not a new national destiny, but a new relationship to one's fellow human beings that finds its fullest

meaning in the way God loves us. Of course, such a relationship transcends and transforms particular political and economic systems as it did for the earliest Christians who entered into a communitarian relationship almost immediately after the resurrection (Acts 2:44-45).

In contrast to Luke, Matthew removes the urgency of Jesus' sayings from the concrete economic and political setting and places them in the context of fulfilling the Torah or Law. The poor become the "poor in spirit," and those who hunger and thirst do no lack food, but hunger and thirst after "righteousness" (Mt. 5:3, 6). It may be improper to say that Matthew "removes" Jesus sayings from the concrete socio-economic context, however, because Matthew's view of Jesus' teachings as a critique of the Palestinian Jewish interpretation of the Law probably more accurately understands the original import of Jesus' sayings (Albright and Fitzmeyer. Matthew. Anchor Bible, cix-cx). Matthew's understanding of Jesus' purpose is well summarized in the Sermon: "Think not that I am come to destroy the law, or the prophets: I am not come to destroy, but to fulfill" (Mt. 5:17).

The gospels never portray Jesus as breaching the Law, though Jesus is charged with breach of the *halakhah* by performing a miracle on the Sabbath (Mt. 12:9-12/Lk 6:6-9/Mk. 3:1-6). His disciples are thrice charged with breach of the *halakhah.* Jesus' disciples ignored the Palestinian interpretation of the Law by picking ears of corn on the Sabbath (Mt. 12:l-2/Mk. 2:23-26/Lk. 6:1-4) by failing to wash their hands before eating (Mk. 7:2-9/Mt. 15:2-9) and by failing to observe the fast (Mt. 9:14-15/Mk. 2:18-20/Lk. 5:33-35). It is important to understand that Jesus does not regard such interpretations as expressing the true meaning of the Law. The Pharisees questioned Jesus, "why do your

disciples not live according to the tradition of the elders, but eat with hands defiled?" The interpretations of the "elders," the *halakhah,* were the authoritative teachers in the Palestinian community (Goppelt, 89). According to the *halakhah,* one was required to purify the hands before each meal. Jesus response was decisive and threatening. Jesus considered the interpretations of Law proposed by the Scribes and Pharisees as the hypocritical "commandments of men" and not from God: "For laying aside the commandments of God, ye hold the tradition of men....Full well you reject the commandments of God and keep the commandments of men." (Mk. 7:8-9).

Jesus did not intend to reject the Law, but to reveal its true meaning. The Essenes at Qumran also rejected the Pharisaic-Rabbinic *halakhah* as the precepts of men and not of God. The last thing they wished, however, was to replace the Law. They considered it impossible to replace the Torah. Instead, they countered the Palestinian interpretation of the Law with a more strict interpretation which they regarded as the hidden meaning of the Law (CD 5:20; 19:15-18). Though Jesus' interpretation of the Law differs significantly from that proposed at Qumran, his attitude toward the casuistic *halakhah* enforced by the Scribes and Pharisees is quite similar. When the head of the synagogue charged Jesus with breach of the public order by healing on the Sabbath (Lk. 13:14), Jesus again responded that such an interpretation of the Law was casuistry, and he charged the leader as a "hypocrite," that is, one who would profess to be something he is not. The Scribes and Pharisees had misinterpreted the commandment to keep the Sabbath, for the Sabbath was made for man and not man for the Sabbath (Mt. 12:8/Mk. 2:28/Lk 6:5). Moreover, Jesus presented himself as having authority to reinterpret the Sabbath command, for "the Son of Man is Lord also of the Sabbath." As the final judge

of the works of all persons, the Son of Man could justify any action, but only in accordance with the Law and justice.

The final authority of Jesus' interpretation of the Sabbath command was not his status as judge, but the obvious and true intent of the Law itself. After Jesus entered into the synagogue, the Pharisees watched him closely to see if he would heal a man on the Sabbath - in particular, they wanted to see if he would heal by touch or by word alone, for healing by touch was forbidden by the Palestinian *halakhah* but healing by the word alone was permissible on the Sabbath (Flusser, 74). Significantly, Jesus healed him by a verbal command without touching the maimed hand. The true meaning of the Sabbath command was not strict compliance with the traditions, but in its power to heal the soul. Jesus' question cut to the heart of the true meaning of the command: "Is it lawful to do good on the Sabbath?" The Pharisees held their peace (Mk. 3:4) both because they could not level a charge against Jesus and because he had exposed their casuistry. Jesus' charge against the Law was not that it should be abolished, but that the Pharisees had overlooked the spirit or true intent of the Law.

Similarly, following the controversy over the disciples' failure to observe the *korban* by purifying their hands before eating, Jesus again exposed the misplaced interpretation of the Law: "Nothing that enters the mouth from outside can defile a man; only those things which come out of the mouth can defile the man." (Mt. 15:ll/Mk. 7:15). Even Jesus' disciples who apparently did not observe the *halakhab* were troubled by this saying, for it seemed to strike at the very heart of the Law which they revered. Jesus' responded to Peter's apparent inability to grasp the meaning of the saying: "are you also unable to understand yet?" Jesus emphasized his understanding of Law again by

revealing its true meaning. He did not suspend the Law, for he did not instruct his disciples that they could eat unclean things; rather, he reveals the meaning of ritual purity: "Don't you understand yet that whatever goes into a man from outside cannot make him unclean, because it goes not go into his heart but through his stomach and passes into the sewer?... It is what comes out of a man that makes him unclean. For it is from within, from men's hearts, that evil intentions emerge: fornication, theft, murder, adultery, *avarice,* malice, deceit, indecency, envy, slander, pride, folly. All These evil things come from within and make a man unclean." (Mk. 7:14-23). Jesus sought the true meaning of the Law by plumbing the depth of the new covenant and the law written in the heart prophesied by Jeremiah, and not as interpreted by men (Jer. 31:31-33).

The command to love enemies is placed in the context of a similar interpretation of the Law by Matthew. The leitmotif of Jesus' Sermon is made explicit by Matthew who is at pains to explain that Jesus did not abolish the Law: "Whoever shall break one of the commandments and teach others to do so will be the least in the kingdom of heaven: but whoever will do and teach them will be great in the kingdom of heaven." (Mt. 5:17, 19). Jesus' Sermon represents the commandments that must be performed for access to the kingdom of God. It represents the fulfillment of the Law by revealing the true meaning of Law and the nature of those who will be deemed worthy of the kingdom.

Jesus contrasted his interpretation of the Law with the written statement of the law in a typical rabbinic manner (Fitzmeyer, CIX). Jesus' formulaic contrast, "You have heard it said by those in past times...but I say unto you," adopts a well-known interpretive device known from the first part of the second century in the writings of Rabbi Ishmael, "I might hear (i.e., you understand the literal meaning)... but you must say (i.e., the

essential meaning is...)." Jesus does not propose a new interpretation, but an interpretation of the true or real meaning underlying the Law. The Qumran covenanters also interpreted the Law and prophets in a manner known as *pesher* (meaning "interpretation"), setting off the common understanding of the Law with its true meaning (James Dunn, Unity and Diversity in the N.T.. SCM Press 1977, 142).

The several contrasts in the Matthean sermon demonstrate that Jesus does not abrogate the Law, but goes beyond the Law. The first contrast is between the command not to commit adultery and the new command to totally overcome the wish to commit adultery: "You have heard it said by those in times past, thou shalt not commit adultery; but I say unto you that whoever looks upon a woman to lust after her has already committed adultery with her in his heart." (Mt. 5:27-28). Note that Jesus does not excuse persons for doing less than is required by the Law; he explicitly prohibited conduct that went beyond the Law which was unconcerned with totally subjective behavior that could not possibly be regulated by the community. The second contrast is between the Law's provisions for divorce and the prohibition against divorce except in the case of adultery (Mt. 5: 31-32). Jesus later explained his opposition to divorce even though allowed explicitly by the Law. In response to the Pharisees query whether it is lawful for a man to divorce his wife, Jesus answered that Moses had allowed divorce only "because of the hardness of your hearts." But Jesus emphasized that divorce had not been allowed from the beginning: "from the beginning of creation God made them male and female ... What God therefore hath joined together, let no man put asunder" (Mt. 19:4-8/Mk. 10:4-5). Jesus seems to have taught that the Law made allowances because of human inability to live a higher Law which prevailed before the time of Moses and which

he was restoring. The restored Law made no provision for human limitations, but is grounded in the divine nature which makes all things possible. The third contrast sets the prohibition of the Law against oaths based on one's life but which allowed oaths performed in the name of God (Mt. 5:33-37). Instead, Jesus disallowed oaths even performed in the name of God, for God should not be profaned by making him the enforcer of secular bonds.

Jesus as Exemplar of the Love of God: The climax of the Great Sermon and of Jesus' new understanding of the Law is the command to love enemies, which is identical in both Matthew and Luke. Both evangelists frame the command as a description of the required character of those who would inhabit the Father's kingdom. There are important differences in the context of the command, however, which demonstrate that the command to love enemies had a different status in Matthew than in Luke:

> Ye have heard that it hath been said,
> An eye for an eye, and a tooth for a tooth (Ex. 21:24):
> But I say unto you, resist not evil:
> but whosoever smite thee on
> thy right cheek,
> turn to him the other also.
> And if a man will sue that at the law,
> and take away thy coat,
> let him have thy cloak also.
> And whosoever shall compel
> thee to go a mile,
> go with him two miles.
> Give to him that asketh of
> thee,
> and from him that would
> borrow of thee turn not thou away.
> Ye have heard that it hath been said,
> Thou shalt love thy neighbor
> (Lev. 19:18),
> and hate thine enemy.
> But I say unto you, Love your
> enemies,

bless them that curse you,
do good to them that hate
you,
and pray for them which
despitefully use you, and
persecute you;
That ye may be the children
of your Father which is in heaven:
for he maketh his sun to rise
on the evil and on the good,
and sendeth rain on the just
and on the unjust.
For if ye love them which
love you,
what reward have you?
do not even the publicans the
same?
And if ye greet your brethren
only,
what do ye more than others?
do not even the publicans the same?
Be ye therefore perfect,
even as your Father which is
in heaven is perfect, (Mt. 5:38-47).

The Great Sermon in Matthew again contains material relating to the Law of Moses which is missing in the Lukean account. Matthew shows Jesus demanding behavior which goes beyond the *lex talionis*, an eye for an eye, by demanding that his disciples not resist *(hantistenai)* evil. The command to not resist evil, along with the contrast of the Law, is missing in Luke. The command not to resist evil should not be understood in the modern sense of rejecting not only all forms of physical violence but also of avoiding any confrontation with those who are responsible for existing evils (Richard J. Cassidy, Jesus, Politics and Society. Orbis 1978, 40-41). Rather, the command relates to the context of not resorting to the remedies provided in the Law of Moses for retaliation to physical violence. Jesus consistently challenged those responsible for existing evils, though he did not sanction violence or recourse to Law as a mode of resolving those evils. Instead,

Jesus taught that personal conversion by turning from the things valued by the world and returning to commitment to the kingdom, was the only answer to the dilemma of response to violence by violence.

The value of the *lex talionis,* however, should not be lightly dismissed. As Albiright and Mann commented, "[i]t should be remembered that the law of retaliation here quoted by Jesus acted, in its own time and for many centuries afterwards, as a much needed check on the widely practiced blood feud. Moreover, the Old Covenant Law provided for recourse to the courts; and however brutal we may think the punishment, it was within set limits and had sanctions which the blood feud did not have" (p. 68). Jesus was instructing his disciples that under the New Covenant, there would be no such recourse to the courts. His disciples must endure anyone who is evil. Hence, they can no longer defend themselves in the courts if someone sues them at law. The point that Jesus is making should not be simplified to the statement that Christians must passively endure evils without any hope of changing the world. Jesus entire message was centered on transforming the world, but the norm of conduct is no longer the Law which Jesus sees as a norm of conduct adapted to the limitations of this world. The new rule of conduct is not the Law adapted to an evil world, but to the kingdom which is breaking into the present whenever and wherever persons act toward one another as the Father acts towards all persons.

Luke discusses the prohibition against entering into relationships for personal gain, but avoids all terminology related to the Law which his gentile audience cannot appreciate. Luke has excised all talk of the *lex talionis* and has avoided the technical terms used by the Law even in those sayings which he does preserve. He removes the

terms *dexian* relating to the Law's definition of striking on the right cheek, *krithenai* relating to the Law's terminology for an action under the law meaning "to sue," and *aggareusei* which relates to being compelled or pressed into service, used in Jesus' time in relation to compulsory carrying of military weapons (Albright and Mann, 69). Luke thus scrupulously avoids legalisms, and transmits those wisdom sayings which transcend any particular legal system. Luke's Jesus commands charity and summarizes what he understands to be the essential meaning of Jesus' message for his audience who might otherwise misunderstand: "As ye desire that men do to you, so do you to them also." (6:31).

The gospel of Matthew includes another contrast not found in Luke's gospel: "You have heard it said. Thou shalt love thy neighbor, and hate thine enemy" (5:43). Only the first phrase, "love thy enemy," is found in the Law. Nowhere does the Law command enemy hate. The command to hate enemies limits the command to love neighbors, for love for one's neighbor in the Jewish thought of Jesus' time had very clearly delineated ethnic and religious limitations. Jesus presented an altogether different understanding of neighbor that extended beyond ethnic boundaries as illustrated in the parable of the Good Samaritan. The command to hate enemies seems to be a gloss on the command to neighbor love that was prominent in Jesus' environment. The Zealots clearly urged violent revolution and hatred for enemies. The Qumran community's Serekh Scroll also taught that members of the community should be loved, but all outsiders should be hated. All who entered the community were required to take an oath "to love all the children of light, each according to his stake in the formal community of God; and to hate all the children of darkness, each according to the measure of his guilt,

which God will ultimately requite" (1QS i, 23-23, trans. Gaster). Jesus does not reject the Law here, he simply expands the concept of neighbor under the Law to include everyone.

Jesus certainly did not reject neighbor-love; he rejected only the gloss of the love-command by some in his day, possibly the Zealots and/or Qumran Covenanters. Luke notes that one of Jesus' disciples, Simon, had a Zealot background. Luke seems to suggest that Jesus "is at least familiar with the main characteristics of the Zealots programs, particularly with their commitment to overthrow Roman rule by force of arms" (Cassidy, 42). The question of whether force and violence should be used to overthrow political oppressors was a burning issue for many in Jesus' day. It is an entirely defensible reading of Jesus' rejection of enemy-hate as explicit rejection of the Zealot program to achieve social justice through force and war. His stance wasn't so much anti-Zealot, however, as pro-kingdom of God. He is at least implicitly rejecting the Zealot program, however, as well as the Qumran theological tradition that sets up boundaries between the elect and the damned, between the loved and hated. As Edward Schi1lebeeckx cogently stated: "what this command to love calls in question is self-righteousness: to give up one's own claim to being in the right is said here to be a demand made by Jesus, a demand 'on God's part' - a demand not to question God's justice but to doubt one's own" (p. 236).

Jesus' command to love even enemies is the apex of his teaching about the kingdom. Throughout history, numerous attempts have been made to understand the command in a way that allows us to get on with life in this world, to soften its universal appeal, but there are no such limitations to the command to love enemies. The enemy-love command is understandable only as a mode of conduct not fit for the present world

because it is intended to transform this world into what it is diametrically opposed to - the kingdom of God. The command asks us to eliminate all boundaries to human love that do not exist for the Father. We must love both neighbor and enemy, both just and unjust, for the Father causes his sun to rise equally on both. Jesus commanded his followers to look beyond the boundaries established by the publicans, for the Father knows no such boundaries to his love. Jesus raised the question of "reward" in this context, not in the sense of a pay-off for exhibiting the right behavior, but in the sense that only when we can be allowed into God's kingdom can we become heirs to the divine life. The promise made by Jesus to his followers was that those who love their enemies will become the children of God, and as such, heirs to kingdom.

The love-command culminates in the command to become like God. Matthew adds at the beginning of the Sermon several blessings statements which summarize other parts of the Sermon and which detail the character of those worthy of the kingdom: “blessed are the peacemakers: for they sail be called the children of God” (Mt. 5:9, cf 5:45). As John Piper stated, love for one's enemies is a "condition" of entrance into the kingdom of God:

> Jesus promised those who loved their enemies that they would thereby become sons of God because God is kind to his enemies.... If you do not obey the command to love your enemies, you will have no reward at all. 'If you love those who love you, what reward do you have?' Answer: none. To love your enemies is to receive the reward of sonship; not to love your enemies is to be denied the reward of sonship. The fulfillment of Jesus' love command is a condition for sonship of the heavenly Father (76-77).

Jesus commanded his followers to love everybody, including enemies, "because [the Father] is kind to the unthankful and to the evil" (Lk. 6:35). Jesus thus concluded his

restatement of the Law with a command which became the sum of the new rule of conduct: "be ye therefore perfect, even as your father in heaven is perfect."

Jesus' entire message is oriented toward showing that we must become like God. Jesus could properly be considered in later theological reflection as a revelation of the ultimate nature of both what God is and what man is and may become because he exemplified the love and conduct of God toward all persons. He ate with sinners and tax-collectors not primarily to offend the sensibilities of his contemporaries, but to show that ethnic and social boundaries must be overcome, for no such boundaries exist for God. His conduct was not less human because it was fully expressive of divinity; rather, it was fully expressive of what is possible for humans if we freely respond to the divine persuasion as did Jesus. Jesus is himself the sign and exemplar of the kingdom of God. Jesus must have realized that his commands were "hard sayings" that appeared absurdly impossible to achieve. Could the world possibly be transformed through love; could political oppression be ended and justice achieved without force and war? No matter how difficult it may seem, Jesus' message and promise was that the peace of the kingdom of God can be achieved in no other way.

The parable of the rich man addressed the seeming impossibility of achieving the kingdom of God. The parable of the rich man is one of the best attested parables in the Synoptics, and responds concretely to the inquiry made by a rich, young man: "Good Master, what must I do to inherit eternal life?" (Mt. 19:16/Mk. 10:17/Lk. 18:18). Jesus' response is both surprising and instructive: "why do you call me good? There is none that is good, save one, that is God." Such a response indicates that Jesus did not understand himself as somehow God or having a nature identical to God. Jesus did not

intend to address his relation to God, however, but the concrete basis for measuring one's acceptability into the kingdom of God - the Father is again the standard of behavior.

Jesus responded further, however, with the commands of the Law: "Thou knowest the commandments, do not commit adultery, do not steal, do not bear false witness, do not defraud, honor your mother and father." Jesus did not teach that the Law had been abolished; to the contrary, its demands remained in full force. The young man responded that he kept the Law, and had done so since his youth. Such a response was sufficient in Judaism. No more could be expected. Jesus continued however: "Yet you lack one thing: go and sell everything you own and give it to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven: and come, follow me." The message was identical in substance to the Great Sermon. Jesus required the young man to go beyond the Law. He required nothing less than that everything valued by this world be converted into everything valued in the kingdom to come. He required further that the young man follow him, not in the sense of merely tagging along, but in the fullest sense of discipleship where Jesus' mode of conduct became also his. The young man could not go beyond the Law and renounce the perishable treasures of this world: "he was very sorrowful, for he had great possessions."

Jesus' retort at the young man's inability to re-evaluate what mattered most simply astonished his disciples: "A rich man shall hardly enter into the kingdom of God." Mark reports that Jesus' disciples could hardly believe what Jesus required to enter into the kingdom. It would be easier for a camel to pass through the eye of a needle than for a rich person to enter the kingdom of God. John Piper explained how such a response was in fact consistent with Jesus' entire message: "the rich man's inability to

enter the Kingdom of God was his inability to meet the condition which Jesus set. A man *cannot* abandon that which he loves most (cf. Lk. 14:26, *dinatai)*. He *cannot* choose against what he values most highly, he *cannot* give his heart to that which he does not treasure (Mt. 6:21 par.). Therefore, as long as a man treasures that which is on earth, whether it be riches (Mk. 10:17-22), family (Lk. 14:25f), religious practices (Lk. 18:9-14, Mt. 6:Iff), wisdom (Mt. 11125 par), political power (Mk. 10:42ff), or his own life (Mk. 8:34f par), it will be impossible for that man to inherit the kingdom of God" (77-78, emphasis in original). Given the natural human tendency to value only earthly treasures (Mt. 6:32; Jn. 5:44), Jesus' disciples were rightly perplexed and troubled at the seemingly impossible requirements imposed by Jesus: "Who then can be saved?" they demanded. Jesus recognized that he requested the impossible: "With men it is impossible, but not with God: for with God all things are possible" (Mt. 19:26/Mk. 10:27/Lk. 18:27).

Jesus demanded that his disciples devote everything to the kingdom of God. They were to do everything humanly possible to achieve it, but still it would be impossible. They were to follow the Torah, and they were capable of so doing, but that of itself was not sufficient. Only after they had done everything they could, and devoted their entire heart, might, mind and strength to the kingdom of God, then, and only then, would God make it possible. Jesus' concept of grace - to use a concept loaded with excess theological baggage that was not used by Jesus in this same sense - is that God enables persons to achieve the impossible after persons have done everything humanly possible. It is not humanly possible, however, to forget that we live here and now in the world and to manifest the divine love even for our enemies, just as it was not possible for the rich man to cease to value his earthly estate over all else. It *is* impossible to love enemies -

unless the Father enables us. The battle over whether faith and grace alone are sufficient, or whether works are required for "salvation," as Jesus understood it, establishes a false dichotomy. Faith in Jesus and works of love for others were, for Jesus, two aspects of the same act. Grace isn't possible until the entire heart, might, mind and soul are devoted to God, and then grace enables and makes possible what isn't otherwise possible. God's grace wasn't sufficient for the rich young man because he refused to change his heart to allow God to change him into a son. He refused to believe that what Jesus offered was truly more valuable than his wealth.

The challenge that confronted Jesus' hearers was found not only in his message and command to bring forth repentance worthy of the kingdom, but also the identity and authority of the new lawgiver. As discussed above, the expectation of a messiah who would appear and decisively liberate the Jewish nation for Roman oppression was intense. Though it is beyond the scope of our purpose to determine what the historical evidence suggests about who and what Jesus claimed to be, it is virtually certain that he did not claim to be the messiah of popular Jewish expectation. The titles that were applied to Jesus in later reflections of the disciples do not necessarily reflect Jesus' self-understanding. For example, Jesus seems to have been reluctant to allow others to refer to him as Messiah. Jesus rebuked the demons and demanded that they be silent when they referred to him as the Holy One of God (Mk. 1:25/Lk. 4:35). Jesus adjured those whom he had healed to remain silent (Mt. 8:4/Mk. 1:44/Lk. 5:14). When Jesus apparently requested his disciples to disclose to him what they understood him to be and Peter confessed that he recognized him as the Messiah, Jesus charged his disciples to refrain from telling others that he was the Messiah (Mt. 16:20/Mk. 8:30/Lk. 9:21). The

gospel of Mark stresses that the disciples themselves did not understand the messianic statements made by Jesus during his lifetime, and only came to understand that he was the Sent One, the Messiah, after his death and resurrection (Mk. 4:13; 6:52; 8:17-21; 9:10; 10:32). Jesus apparently avoided open and public discussion of his identity, and taught in parables to conceal "the secret of the kingdom of God" from those who would fail to value his message properly; for it would be as casting pearls before swine (Mt. 13:9-17/Mk. 4:11-13/Lk. 8:9-10). Whatever else may be gathered from such reticence, these are not the actions of one who desires to promulgate the message that all should publicly recognize him as Messiah.

As suggested above, Jesus may have understood himself to be the Son of Man, but not the son of man of popular Jewish apocalyptic expectation. Jesus apparently felt that he could judge the sins of others in role as the Son of Man, but as we have seen, his judgment was invariably one of forgiveness and acquittal. Further, the Gospels reveal that he saw himself not as the triumphant Son of Man who would come in decisive glory on the throne of God, but as a suffering Son of Man that was foreign to the popular understanding. Jesus' disciples understood after his death that his death was an atonement, an event that Jesus undertook on their behalf to reconcile them to the Father. In Mark (as source, with parallels in Matthew and Luke) there are three predictions of the future suffering of the Son of Man, presented as unmistakable predictions of Jesus' own fate. Each prediction is more precise and detailed than the previous one. Though the understandings of the Son of Man's suffering represented in these sayings were undoubtedly expanded and interpreted by the later disciples before being placed in the Gospels, we can legitimately ask if Jesus' own self-understanding developed as his

identity became clearer to him. Though the sayings have likely been made clearer by the later disciples who wrote with the benefit of hind-sight, Jesus seems to have sensed impending suffering and death, but also believed that God would make him victorious.

Immediately following Peter's confession whereby he recognized Jesus as the Messiah, Jesus "began to teach [his disciples] that the Son of man must suffer many things, and be rejected of the elders, and of the chief priest and scribes, and be killed, and after three days rise again" (Mk. 8:31; par Mt. 16:21/Lk. 9:22). The context suggests that Jesus strived with his disciples to correct their understanding of him. It is no wonder they could not grasp his meaning, however, because Jesus offered an understanding that required a revolution in familiar concepts about the Son of man. How could a divine being undergo death? Such a suggestion was simply foreign to the Jewish understanding of the divine nature - just as much as it is for us. When Jesus had departed to Galilee with his disciples, he apparently tried again to teach them that "the Son of Man is delivered into the hands of men, and they shall kill him; and after the he is killed, he shall rise the third day (Mk. 9:31; par. Mt. 17:22/Lk. 9:44). The evangelists are quick to point out, however, that the disciples "understood not that saying, and were afraid to ask him [what it meant]" (Mk. 9:31/Mt.17:23/Lk. 9:45).

Immediately before entering Jerusalem for the last time, Jesus was apparently aware that he faced danger. He is presented as having told his disciples that they would go to Jerusalem where "the Son of man shall be delivered unto the chief priest, and the scribes, and they shall condemn him to death, and shall deliver him to the Gentiles: and they shall mock him, and shall scourge him, and shall spit upon him, and shall kill him: and the third day he shall rise again" (Mk. 10:33-34/Mt. 20:18-19/Lk. 18:32-34).

Hebrews 5:7-8 reports that Jesus too had to grow in awareness through trials and manifest faith that the Father could prevail even the face of death: "In the days when he was in the flesh, he offered prayers and supplications with cries and tears to God who was able to save him from death, and he was heard because of his reverence. Son though he was, he learned obedience from what he suffered." As Raymond Brown eloquently observed, "Jesus had preached that God's kingdom would be realized most readily when human beings acknowledged their dependence on God....We humans come most clearly to terms with our helplessness when we face death. Did Jesus, the proclaimed of the Kingdom, himself have to experience the vulnerability of dying before the Kingdom could be achieved through him?" (A Crucified Christ in Holy Week. Ligurcial Press, Collegeville Minn., 1986, 17). The progression of understanding presented in the Synoptics suggests that Jesus perceived intimations of the violent death that awaited him, but believed that he would have, nevertheless, a leading role in the kingdom that would be established before all of his disciples died (Mk. 9:1/Mt. 16:28/Lk. 9:27).

Jesus seized the opportunity upon entering Jerusalem to teach his disciples what and who they should understand him to be. The synoptic gospels, apparently with Mark as source and parallels in Matthew and Luke, and John on the basis of an apparently independent source, report that Jesus, by previous arrangement, sent two disciples for a colt. Jesus mounted the colt to ride it into the city. There is little question that Jesus made the arrangements for the colt for the purpose of fulfilling the messianic prophecy found in Zechariah 9:9-10:

> See now, your king come to you;
> he is victorious, he is triumphant,
> humble and riding on a donkey,
> on a colt, the foal of a donkey.

> he will banish the chariots from Ephraim
> and horses from Jerusalem;
> the bow of war will be banished.
> He will proclaim peace for the nations.

Jesus appears to have consciously chosen entry into the city on a colt to demonstrate to his disciples that he was the messiah, but not the expected messiah; rather, he was the king of peace who would make war superfluous and proclaim peace to all nations. The Synoptics report that Jesus was greeted by a crowd of people who recognized him as king. This last fact is undoubtedly a gloss added by the Synoptic writers to make Jesus' action more closely fulfilled by the prophecy, for it contradicts entirely what the gospels say elsewhere about Jesus' mode of revealing himself as Messiah. He did not teach openly that he was the king, the Messiah, and if even his disciples failed to understand his claims, there is little chance that the public at large accepted Jesus as king. It is therefore unthinkable that a large crowed should greet him, recognizing him as the king. Had such a public entry in fact occurred, it is unexplainable why the Roman authorities did not seize him immediately as a claimant to the throne or as a messianic pretender. E. P. Sanders's assessment of the triumphal entry is probably accurate:

> The [triumphal] entry was probably deliberately managed by Jesus to symbolize the coming kingdom and his role in it. I account for the fact that Jesus was not executed until after the demonstration against the temple by proposing that it was an intentionally symbolic action, performed because Jesus regarded it as true (he would be king, but a humble one) and for the sake of the disciples, but that it did not attract large public attention. (306)

Jesus then symbolically proclaimed his status as king and the messiah in the triumphal entry. The prophecy in Zechariah is one of the few that he could choose to fulfill to show that he was not the expected political deliverer. Instead, he teaches

unmistakably that the messiah is a humble king who reigns by bringing peace. It seems that the disciples were in on the secret and knew that Jesus made claim to be the king, the messiah of love. He was the king in the sense that he and his disciples would have preeminent positions as judges in the kingdom which was to dawn in its fullness before the then present generation had all passed away, but would be established not by human might, but by persons accepting God's reign through manifesting the love that makes God's sphere of influence spread to earth. Jesus' kingdom, though very real, was not of this world and therefore posed no threat to Roman reign except to the extent it might transform the entire world through conversion. The kingdom is established not by force and war, but by divine persuasion which is freely integrated into the lives of Jesus' disciples. Jesus was the exemplar of a life which fully integrated God's will, and which was thus a sign of the kingdom to those who knew him.

It is clear that Jesus was executed for claiming to be a king, for all of the Gospels (including John) note that a superscription was placed above his cross which mocked him as a claimant to be "the King of the Jews." The gospel of Luke adds interesting details to the passion narrative which demonstrate Jesus as the exemplar of God's love. After the scourging of the temple and agonizing prayer in Gethsemane, Jesus was betrayed by one of his own followers. It is reported that Peter cut off the ear of one of the soldiers who had come to take Jesus into custody. Luke alone reports that Jesus rebuked Peter and then healed the ear. The gospel of Luke clearly portrays Jesus as responding to force with love. Matthew adds a rebuke that is, apparently independently, supported also by the gospel of John: "put your sword back in its place: for all who take up the sword shall perish by the sword." (Mt. 26:52/Jn. 18:11). Luke alone reports that Jesus died among

two thieves, just as he had lived among sinners and the socially impotent whose only hope is the kingdom of God. Even in his most dire hour, Jesus exemplified enemy-love in his conduct by rebuking his disciple for attempting to use force to resolve a dispute which he clearly understood would result in injustice and death. The words from the cross, reported only in Luke, are of similar import. Jesus willingly forgave even those who put him to death, for they simply did not understand what they were doing (Lk. 23:34). A more concrete example of enemy-love can hardly be imagined.

Whatever else might be doubted, it is almost certain that Jesus of Nazareth was crucified - a more excruciatingly painful mode of death cannot be imagined. Whatever else the tragedy of his death might have meant to his disciples, it must have led them to despair and offered definitive proof that the kingdom that would be established by love is easily snuffed out by injustice and violence. It was impossible to maintain hope in the face of Jesus' death, and the disciples understandably panicked and fled, lest they suffer a similar fate. Nevertheless, the story of Christian hope is predicated on the ironic fact that the disciples triumphed in suffering an almost identical fate.

Jesus' death was not, of course, the final word. The resurrection appears to be an experience inexplicable on historic and natural grounds, and yet the enduring Christian faith is difficult to explain unless one assumes some kind of dramatic and otherwise inexplicable event or events that showed Jesus to be victorious over death - the final enemy. An analysis of the resurrection narratives is clearly beyond the scope of this study, and yet the question of Jesus' resurrection remains central to the demand that our world must take Jesus' message about enemy-love seriously. If the fate of those who manifest enemy-love is sure annihilation and ultimate victory of evil over good, how can

we confidently suggest that the key to our own world crisis is found in Jesus' message? If Jesus was in fact victorious through love, however, then perhaps there is a power that can render the humanly impossible possible - and if Jesus is right, that power is most likely manifest, and perhaps only can be manifest, where humans love one another across all boundaries as God does. If Jesus is right, it may just be that the only hope for our world lies in recognizing that after everything we can do - striving with nothing held back, might, mind, heart and soul - God will enable us to achieve what is otherwise humanly impossible. Perhaps then, and only then, we will discover a solution as unlikely as the meek inheriting the earth or a man rising from death.