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A Theological Implication of 'Humility' in Mark 10: 13-16 from the Perspective of the Parable of the Kingdom of God

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Abstract

The parable of the Kingdom of God brings the seriousness of studying about the meaning of what the Lord Jesus Christ wants to say. There are many arguments to say about the meaning of the Kingdom of God, while a new approach of the twentieth century appears. The study of historical Jesus by N. Wright gives the idea of Jesus, Israel and the Cross. If the parable of the Kingdom of God is retelling the story of Israel, then the new concept of the Kingdom of God should be different from the old Israel. The concept of humility should be seen as the way out of the Kingdom of God. Mark 10: 13 – 16 where the Lord Jesus Christ uses the concept of the little children, it apparently shows the helplessness and humility concepts as the way out for the Kingdom of God. However, the concept of humility should be seen as the proclamation of the Kingdom of God in the perspective of mission to the people. Finally, the concept of humility also should not beyond the limitation of the Gospel. It should be in line of the meaning of the Gospel itself. We are encouraged not to repeat what the history happens, but rather to learn from the history of Liberation Theology.

1. Introduction

The usage of figurative language in Mark 10: 13 – 16 gives the picture of Jesus in conveying the message of the Kingdom of God. Whoever would like to be in the Kingdom of God should be like little children. However, one should ask: Why is it important that the Kingdom of God should have a characteristic being little children? D. A. Carson points out that the Gospel of Mark shows the way of glory and suffering, where the Lord should experience, by putting the teaching of Jesus to certain areas of life for instances: divorce, humility and the difficulty of combining wealth with discipleship.¹ Therefore, it seems that the term of humility is appropriate word to convey the message for entering the Kingdom of God. Ralph Martin insists that the

¹ Carson, D.A., Moo, Douglas J and Morris. Leon., *An Introduction to the New Testament*, (Michigan: Grand Rapids, 1992), 90-91.

Gospel of Mark shows the two general concerns, which are Christology and Discipleship.² He goes on saying that Mark presents to his readers to understand who Jesus is and what real disciples involves.³

From what it has been said above, it leads people to see the background of this research, where it will be divided into several mainstreams. The first main stream is to look at the real picture of the Kingdom of God especially the parable of the Kingdom of God. Then, the argument will be built up to the meaning of the Kingdom of God, which will emerge to the Gospel of Mark 10: 13 – 16. Afterwards, the research will explore the ethics of the Kingdom of God in the light of humility before it will discuss a theological implication for the Kingdom of God.

The Kingdom of God (The Parable of the Kingdom of God)

Looking at the Kingdom of God (the Parable of the Kingdom of God), one should see the new approach in the twentieth century. N. T. Wright, the author of *New Testament and the People of God*, tries to approach Jesus from the perspective of historical Jesus.⁴ His approach is quite fascinating and gives the impact for the Biblical Theology. The approach is making the syllogism between Jesus and Israel in the area of Gospel.⁵ The ministry of Jesus Christ, actually, came from the historical origin of John the Baptist when he warned Israel for the wrath to come and urged them to turn when there was still a time.

According to N. T. Wright, Jesus did not merely proclaim judgment against the people of God, because He identified Himself with Israel. If this is so, the interpretation of the history of Jesus should be seen from the historical context of Jesus. When Jesus welcomed 'sinners' and ate with them, and He healed those afflicted with a variety of physical and mental ailments, Jesus actually restores to membership in Israel those who had been on the margins of the holy society., whether through the physical defects or moral and social blemishes.

By doing so, Jesus mixed together with sinners in the physical contact certainly would develop that Jesus identifies himself with sinful Israel. Therefore, the primary of Jesus' ministry was to restore Israel with judgement only with an additional warning.⁶ If Jesus identifies Himself with Israel, then it will seem to me that Jesus is the

² Martin, Ralph, *Mark: Evangelist and Theologian*, (Michigan: Zondervan, 1972), pp. 156-162.

³ Ibid.

⁴ Wright, N. T., *New Testament and The People of God*, (London: SPCK, 1992).

⁵ See Wright, N. T., 'Jesus, Israel, and The Cross', *SBL*, ed. K. H. Richards (California: Scholars Press, 1985), pp. 75-95.

⁶ See ibid and Sander, E. P., *Pasul and Palestenian Judaism: A Comaprison f Patterns of Religion*, (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1977).

representative of Israel. Therefore, the parable of the Kingdom of God is retelling the story of Israel.⁷

When Jesus told the story of Tenants: “Listen to another parable: There was a landowner who planted a vineyard. He put a wall around it, dug a winepress in it and built a watchtower. Then he rented the vineyard to some farmers and moved to another place. When the harvest time approached, he sent his servants to the tenants to collect his fruit. “The tenants seized his servants; they beat one, killed another, and stoned a third. Then he sent other servants to them, more than the first time, and the tenants treated them the same way. Last of all, he sent his son to them. ‘They will respect my son,’ he said. “But when the tenants saw the son, they said to each other, ‘This is the heir. Come, let’s kill him and take his inheritance.’ So they took him and threw him out of the vineyard and killed him. “Therefore, when the owner of the vineyard comes, what will he do to those tenants?” “He will bring those wretches to a wretched end,” they replied, “and he will rent the vineyard to other tenants, who will give him his share of the crop at harvest time.”

Jesus said to them, “Have you never read in the Scriptures: “‘The stone the builders rejected has become the cornerstone; the Lord has done this, and it is marvelous in our eyes’[a]? “Therefore I tell you that the kingdom of God will be taken away from you and given to a people who will produce its fruit. Anyone who falls on this stone will be broken to pieces; anyone on whom it falls will be crushed.”[b] When the chief priests and the Pharisees heard Jesus’ parables, they knew he was talking about them. They looked for a way to arrest him, but they were afraid of the crowd because the people held that he was a prophet.

Looking at the parable, it retells the story about Israel. The parable of the Tenants told that the landowner asked for his fruits his fruits from the tenants. But the tenants would not give his and the landowners sent all his men to the tenants and were killed. It was the picture of the God who sent His prophets in the Old Testament and was killed by the old Israel. Even the landowner sent his own son and hope for his fruit, but the tenants killed him. The story was exactly the same when God sent His own son to Israel in order to ask His fruit, but Israel killed Him and hung Him on the Cross. Therefore, the parable of the Kingdom of God is the story of the past Israel where Jesus identifies himself with Israel, because He is Israel. This is then called as syllogism. Caird supports this by saying: “*He goes on to His death at the hands of a Roman judge on a charge of which he was innocent and his accusers, as the event proved, were guilty. And so, not only in theological truth but in historic fact, he bore the sins of the*

⁷ See Wright, *NTPG*, p. 299.

many, confident that in him the whole Jewish nation was being nailed to the cross, only to come to life again. In a better resurrection, and that the Day of the Son of Man which would see the end of the Old Israel would see also the vindication of the new.”⁸

The parable of the Kingdom of God should be interpreted in the perspective of the historical events. When Jesus told about the parable of the Kingdom of God, Jesus would like to retell the story of the past Israel in the new manner of parable. This is why the reason the people (even the disciples) did not understand the meaning of the parable itself.

From what it has been said above, it leads us to see how the Gospel of Mark brought the concept the Kingdom of God to show the proclamation of the power of God. However, the question arises: What can humans do about the kingdom? E. P. Sanders views that Kingdom is social concept, because each individual should prepare for the kingdom of God should influence society.⁹ His argument was based on the three possibilities of the preparation for the kingdom. Firstly, at the death people's souls will enter the kingdom of heaven; or they will die and await the resurrection of the body; or possibly God will bring His kingdom to earth before they die.¹⁰

If E. P. Sanders' argument could be accepted, then kingdom seems to refer only to a supernatural society, one governed by God Himself. Therefore, human can get ready for it, but otherwise they cannot do anything about it. Here then, the Gospel of Mark in chapter 10: 13-16 conveys kingdom is like the little children.¹¹ Looking at the meaning of the Kingdom of God, it is retelling the story of Israel and how the concept of the Gospel of Mark forms the society of the kingdom should be like little children, then Jesus' mission is to prepare the people to receive the coming kingdom of God.¹²

2. Method

The method used in this study is an analysis descriptive on the text of Mark 10: 13-16, which telling about the Kingdom of God. The theme related to the text is about children who came to Jesus. The text describes about situation when Jesus' disciples prevented children reaching Jesus. The story told by Mark was pointing a condition to be a part of God's Kingdom; how should people treat children, reflected entering God's Kingdom. So the exposition of the text on Mark 10:13-16 would give understanding about the Kingdom of God.

⁸ Caird, G. B., *Jesus and the Jewish Nation*, (London Athlone Press, 1965), p 22.

⁹ Sanders, E. P., *The Historical Figure of Jesus*, (London: The Penguin Press, 1993), p. 170

¹⁰ See *ibid.*

¹¹ Cf. Sanders, p. 170.

¹² Cf. Dodd, C. H., *The parables of the Kingdom*, (Michigan, SCM Press, 1962).

3. Discussion

Ethical Kingdom of God in Mark 10: 13-16

This section is going to explore how ethical teaching of Jesus, where people concerned that Jesus was teaching human conduct mostly in His teaching, applies to the kingdom of God. This leads F. G. Peabody to comment that the first demand of Jesus was not orthodox instruction or for ecstatic religious experience but for morality.¹³ It makes Klausner insists, "If ever the day should come and this ethical code be stripped of its wrapping of miracles and mysticism, the Book of the Ethics of Jesus will be one of the choicest treasures of the literature of Israel for all time."¹⁴ Therefore, the ethic of Jesus was the ideal standard of conduct, which is valid for all time in all situations and carries in itself its own authentication and sanction.

In looking at Mark 10: 13 – 16, people would like to see how the Lord teaches His disciples to be like children in order to enter the Kingdom of God. The Gospel of Mark seems to teach His disciples and the readers to understand the ethical teaching of Jesus concerning the Kingdom of God. Marshall says, "All the ethical teaching of Jesus is simply an exposition of the ethics of the Kingdom of God, of the way in men inevitably behave when they actually come under the rule of God."¹⁵ If Marshall's view is accepted, then Mark 10: 13 – 16 pictures the idea of humility being little children as the Lord wants to teach for His disciples. This idea points out the eschatology where C. H. Dodd pushes very much on the teaching of Jesus, which is not an ethic for those who expect the end of the world, but for those who have experienced the end of this world and the coming of the Kingdom of God.¹⁶

As it results, then the idea of humility being like little children gives the scope of entering the Kingdom of God. This kingdom brings the ethics of the reign of God and this ethics must be absolute ethics. The ethic, which Jesus teaches, is humility for the discipleship for entering the kingdom of God. Being humble is the bottom line of the teaching of Jesus for His disciple to face up the kingdom of God. The Lord also wants to give out a new emphasis upon the righteousness of heart. The primary is on the inner character that underlies outward conduct. The example is the Law condemned murderer; Jesus condemned anger as sin. Therefore, humility is the foundation for the people of God to enter the Kingdom of God.

¹³ Peabody, F. G., *Jesus Christ and Christian Character*, (Michigan: Fortress Press, 1906), p. 103.

¹⁴ Klausner, J., *Jesus of Nazareth*, (Michigan: Fortress Press, 1925), p. 381.

¹⁵ Marshall, L. H., *The Challenge of New Testament Ethics*, (Grand Rapids: William B Eerdmans, 1947), p. 31.

¹⁶ Dodd, C. H., *History of the Gospel*, (Grand Rapids: William B Eerdmans, 1938), p. 125.

If we agree on the matter of the parable of the Kingdom of God as the retelling the story of the past Israel, then we should look at the condition of the past Israel where the Lord Jesus Christ was referring to. According to the book of Exodus, Israel was expelled by God, because of the hardness of their heart.¹⁷ Their disobedient did not lead Israelites to the promise land, which was Canaan. They were expelled by God to be strangers in the other land. They did not soften their heart, but they hardened their heart when God showed His own way and promised them to go for the flowing milk and honey. This points that the parable of the Kingdom of God would like to retell the story of past Israel, where it shows only humility will certainly lead to the people of Israel come to the promise land.

Thus, the ethical of Kingdom of God to be like little children must be a bottom line for entering the Kingdom of God according to Mark 10: 13 – 16. Put in the other way, the Old Testament law is set within the context of the covenant.¹⁸ It expresses the love of God for His people and the psalmists extol law – keeping as a powerful means of expressing His people's love for them.¹⁹ The Lord blended an affirmation of law with an insistence that law – keeping must be warned and motivated by humility.

If the Old Testament's covenant law contains many specific appeals to the character of God and actions, in support of ethical of ethical demands, then the teaching of Christ about the Kingdom of God adds a sense of urgency, because the coming Kingdom is imminent. The imminent way is to carry the promise – or threat – of judgement, but there is a powerful stimulus to live life the way God wants you to live it now. In other words, the work of Christ is complete, the Kingdom is already established. Therefore, Christians are called to live out its values ad witness to its new relationships, knowing that this will sometimes involve conflict and challenge. As a result, the character of humility is needed to show the uniqueness of being Disciples of Christ to own the Kingdom of God.²⁰

An Exposition of Mark 10: 13 – 16

Like the other three Gospels, Mark is anonymous.²¹ Around the year 125 A. D, the title indicates the important segment of the early church and named Mark, who

¹⁷ See Hebrews 4: 7, Psalm 95: 7,8.

¹⁸ Field, D. H., 'Ethics', in *New Dictionary of Theology*, ed. Sinclair B Ferguson and David F Wright, (Leicester: IVP, 1988), p. 233.

¹⁹ See *ibid.*

²⁰ Cf. Field, pp. 233-235.

²¹ Here I am not discussing about who the author is. There are smany New Testament scholars discussing about the author of the Gospel of Mark. See Carson, D. A., Douglas, J. Moo, and Morris, Leon, *An Introduction to the New Testament*, (Michigan: Zondervan Publishing, 1992).

wrote the second Gospel.²² C. H. Dodd pointed out that the Gospel of Mark seemed to follow the basic kerygma of Peter's rehearsal in Acts 10: 36 – 41.²³ Dodd has noted that the sequence of the Gospel of Mark follows the same sequence revealed in the preaching of the early church.

D. A. Carson noted that another purpose of the Gospel of Mark especially the theme is discipleship.²⁴ Mark portrays the disciples as heard heart (6: 52), spiritual weak (14: 32 – 42) and incredibly dim – witted (8: 14 – 21). Guelich mentioned that the Gospel of Mark presents the disciples as both privileged and perplexed.²⁵ Perhaps in both these ways they are models for the disciples of the day of Mark and ours: privileged to belong to the kingdom, yet perplexed about the apparent reverses suffered by that kingdom when Christians suffer.

Looking at chapter 10: 13 – 16, Carson has placed it under the theme of the way of glory and suffering.²⁶ He points out that Mark 10: 13 – 16 is in the main course of chapter 8: 27 – 10: 52. Therefore, people should see the bigger context in order to see the small context of chapter 10: 13 – 16. With the verse 31 an entirely new orientation is given to the Gospel. This change is defined by the explicit and new teaching concerning the necessity of the passion of Jesus and also by a sharp change in tone.²⁷ This section, according to Lane, offers the three cardinal announcements of forthcoming humiliation, which have as structured a function as they do in the Gospel of Mark.²⁸ Therefore, the primary purpose of this section is to explain what it means for Jesus to be the Messiah and what it requires to be identified with him. Throughout this section, there is a sustained emphasis upon the journey to Jerusalem. The meaning of the journey to Jerusalem is defined by the repeated announcements of the passion of Jesus, where He goes to Jerusalem to fulfil his messianic destiny.

In narrowing the context of Mark 10: 13 – 16, then we will see the pronouncement should be directed to the disciples, but has pertinence for all men confronted by the Gospel because it speaks of the condition for entrance into the Kingdom of God (verse 15). Lane points out that the demand for a man to become as a little child calls for a fresh realisation that he is utterly helpless in his relationship to the Kingdom of God.²⁹ Lane continues by saying: "*The Kingdom is that which God gives*

²² See Carson, D. A., Douglas, J. Moo, and Morris, Leon, *An Introduction to the New Testament*, (Michigan: Zondervan Publishing, 1992), p. 92.

²³ Dodd, C. H., 'The Framework of the Gospel Narrative', *ExpTim* 43 (1932), pp. 396 – 400.

²⁴ See Carson, op. cit., p. 107.

²⁵ Guelich, Robert A., *Mark 1 – 8: 26*, (Texas: Word, 1989), p. xlii

²⁶ See Carson, op. cit., p. 90

²⁷ See Lane, William, *The Gospel of Mark*, (Michigan: William B Eerdmans, 1974), p. 292.

²⁸ See *ibid.*

²⁹ See Lane, op. cit., p. 360.

and that which a man receives. Essential to the comparison developed in verse 15 is the objective littleness and helplessness of the child, which is presupposed in verse 14 as well. The Kingdom may be entered only by one who knows he is helpless and small, without claim or merit."³⁰ In other words, Jesus is emphatic that the man who does not receive the Kingdom of God now, simply and naturally as the little children received him, will not enter into the Kingdom of God when it is finally established in the consummation.

In the verse 16, Deissmann points out that the action of the Lord Jesus Christ in honouring the children offers concrete illustration that the blessings of the Kingdom of God are freely given.³¹ In context, the bestowing of the blessing constitutes a fresh reiteration of the call to true discipleship and obedience to the intention of God.

From what it has been said above, the figurative language of picturing the little children, it shows the helplessness. However, the helplessness is included in the heading of humility, where the Gospel of Mark shows that humility is the bottom line for entering the Kingdom of God. This leads people to see that the figurative language of picturing the little children is not only conveying the message of humility, but also it brings the idea of the Old Testament theology. In other words, the history of the past Israel, which is pictured by the new parable of the Kingdom of God, is conveyed and reflected what the Old Israel had done in the past. The story of the past Israel, where they had never come to the promise land, should never happen again when the Lord Jesus Christ pictured the little children in Mark 10: 13 – 16. As a result, we should discuss it in the next section.

Theological Implication of Humility in Mark 10: 13 -16

After looking the arguments above, N. T. Wright tried to identify that Jesus and Israel needs to be the same. In other words, Jesus identified himself with Israel. George Eldon Ladd comments that Jesus did not undertake his ministry with the evident purpose of starting a new movement either within or outside of Israel.³² He also insists that Jesus, throughout his life, accepted the authority of the Old Testament, conformed to temple practices, engaged in synagogue worship and the entire of his life as a Jew.³³ In other words, the mission of Jesus Christ was that the inaugurating a time of fulfilment in advance of an eschatological consummation. Therefore, Sanders seems to

³⁰ Lane, op. cit. pp. 360 – 361.

³¹ See Deissmann, A., *Light from the Ancient East*, (New York: Lighthouse, 1929), pp. 167 – 170.

³² See Ladd, George Eldon, op. cit., p. 104.

³³ Ibid.

be right when he called that the mission of Jesus was Jewish restoration eschatology in the Kingdom of God.³⁴

If the argument of N. T. Wright is acceptable, then the idea of the Kingdom of God retells the story of Israel can be true. When the lord Jesus Christ explained about the Kingdom of God to his disciples and the people at his time, actually he referred his teaching of the Kingdom of God to the past Israel. He tried to identify that the Kingdom of God retold the story of the failure of Israel and needed to have exodus in his time. In other words, the Lord Jesus Christ implemented the new concept in the Kingdom of God by comparing the failure of the past Israel. The past Israel was very proud as the nationality and they claimed that their national batch was the Law-given at the Mount Sinai. They were indeed proud and stiff necked people throughout their history.

4. Conclusion

N. T Wright in his presupposition seems to be right to identify that Jesus tries to identify himself with Israel in his theology of historical Jesus. If this is so, then the parable of the Kingdom of God retells the story of Israel and warns the people not to be like the past Israel. Being a new Israel should possess the character of humility. Therefore, theological implication of humility also should be done in the purpose of God, not too far beyond the history.

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³⁴ See Sanders, p. 150.

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