



September 27th

THE NEW SHOFAR

The only Way to Life is the Way of Jesus

The problem: the Way of Jesus requires humility

GOD: Is my way unfair? Is it not your ways that are unfair?

In the Book of Revelation, John has a vision of the martyrs at rest beneath the altar in the throne room of God. They cry out to God: *How long O God?* It is a great insight, for what human being has not wondered about the perceived injustices inflicted upon believers? Why does God not do more to protect those who follow His Son? Why does injustice, selfishness, greed, abuses of power, hubris and anger dominate our world? If God truly was God; if Jesus truly did rise from the dead and inaugurate the Kingdom of God on earth, why does this fear, or suffering, or darkness and anguish continue?

O the depth of the riches and wisdom and knowledge of God!

This heading is the way Paul speaks of God's ways to the Church in Rome (11:33). The context here is important. He is outlining the amazing gift of forgiveness and divine adoption offered to us by Jesus. God showers us with heavenly love – *while we were still sinners!* It is a free, undeserved, unearned love. God gave us His Son because out of the abundance of His *riches and wisdom and knowledge* He cares for us and desires that we live with Him forever.

As Paul writes, we do not understand the *mysterious ways of God*. What we do know from experience is just how much we depend on His divine compassion. Fortunately, God does not move and act as we humans would move and act. Thanks be to God that His ways are beyond our understanding, that they not always align with human understanding.

Let the same mind be in you that was in Christ Jesus

That might not be a massive consolation to those who find themselves suffering, particularly if they feel that suffering is unjust. What we want is for God to apply our already well-formed solution to the situation. Then we would be content.

The difficulty is, what we want is for God to intervene when, where and how we expect Him to act. At other times, we are quite happy to get on with life under our own management and direction. God then becomes useful in sorting out life when it is difficult and out of our control. We become like gods for the rest. It is at this moment we have the temerity to cry out to God: *How long O God?*

It is in the Scriptures that we find God's revealed Way of resolving this. We can find the Way to a fullness of our humanity in the Wisdom and Teachings of the Lord God. The first and most accessible of those Ways is Jesus who is the Christ (Messiah) of God.

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Remember: it is not you that support the root, but the root that supports you.

In Romans 11, Paul uses a powerful image of an olive tree, with its roots and branches. He is writing to Gentile Christians who had become arrogant and judgmental. They were abusive of the Jews, accusing them of turning their back on the God of their forefathers through the persecution of the followers of Jesus. Those Gentiles were in danger of rejecting all God had been doing in Israel's history, seeing the Church as the "new" Israel, rather than the reconstituted Israel of which Luke's Acts writes.

Paul acknowledges that God made room for Gentiles on the Olive Tree (the Kingdom) with the dropping away of branches that represented those Jews who did not accept Jesus as Saviour. Gentiles were *grafted* to the tree in their place. Instead of producing wild olives they were now called upon to produce the fruit of the Kingdom.

Here is Paul's point: God's expectation is that each and every believer produces daily *the fruit of the root* of the Olive tree. That root is God – God as revealed to us in Jesus who is the Christ, our Lord and Saviour. What God judges is not our human tags – Jew, Gentile, male, female, white, black or any other worldly measure. What God seeks is the way we have collaborated with the works of Christ the Root and produced fruit for the peoples of the world in their manifold needs.

However, we produce fruit only inasmuch as we are connected to the Holy Root. We are connected to the Root through our connection with the branches and the trunk – the Church and our brothers and sisters in Christ. Cut off from the root, we are powerless. We will surely die and be taken away by the gardener and burned in the fire. The only thing of lasting importance is the Root and our connection to that Root.

For John came to you in the way of righteousness and you did not believe him

Matthew's Jesus has only just cleansed the Temple in Jerusalem and challenged the leaders of Judaism over their stiff and legalistic approach to Covenanted life with God. They had allowed their pride and confidence in the religious institutions to replace a Living, Loving and Merciful God. This pride in turn kept them from discovering the simple truths that tax collectors and prostitutes were discovering. They found God's love in the ministry and person of His Son Jesus because they were sinners in need of God.

They knew they were sinners.... *but the tax-collectors and the prostitutes believed him*. That did not mean they automatically ceased being sinners. What is important here is the way God welcomes, indeed reaches out to sinners who yearn for forgiveness and an opportunity to begin again. And again; and again; and again. It is not about *being perfect* but in striving for perfection with the power of God's undeserved grace.

Fortunately, the ways of God are not our ways or we would be rejected on account of our failings and our sins. God loves us even before we respond to that divine love with love of our own. But we need to remain connected to the Root if we desire that Divine Love to flow through us and enable us to produce the fruits of the Kingdom. Imagine a world in which every believer produced those fruits in faith... *love, joy, peace, patience, kindness goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control*"

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