

# TALES OF THE KINGDOM

Jesus often spoke in parables to illustrate truth. Stories and parables can often capture our thoughts and heart in a further way than plain teaching can accomplish. Towards this same goal, may these stories and poems awaken in you some of the wisdom and values of the kingdom of God in a fresh and delightful way! -Norman Holmes

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## The Wind and the Rose Bush

One warm, sunny day Wind was on one of his journeys when he heard someone sobbing in the field below. He swooshed down to see who was crying, to find a young rose bush growing among some crabgrass and weeds. As Wind came nearer he saw that the rose bush was still fairly small, little more than a leafy stalk with its first tiny bud. It was also a bit wilted and had lost its shine.

“Why are you crying?” asked Wind.

“Leave me alone” replied Rose, “I’m figuring something out.”

“But I would like to help you” said Wind. “I have seen many things during my travels, and many plants much older and wiser than yourself have asked me for advice before.”

“I don’t know. I’m struggling so hard to grow, sometimes I feel like just staying like I am.”

“But you mustn’t do that,” said Wind. “You were planted here to grow up into a sturdy rose bush with beautiful red flowers.”

“Maybe so, but I don’t know why I was planted here in this hard crusty soil. I’m all alone except for these greedy weeds that try to choke me and take all the sunlight. Besides, the gardener who planted me here seems to hardly ever come around to care for me. I feel like I need lots of help, but I don’t know who I can trust.”

“Young Rose, there are many things you don’t understand yet. For one thing, the gardener never plants anything where the soil is not good for its growth. It’s true that you were planted in hard ground, but you should be thankful. As you grow up you will find your roots will become very strong and will be able to dig through it easily. As for the weeds, you should know that the gardener takes care of a very large estate, and the Lord of the estate has told him to not pull up the weeds in the fields, but only in the gardens. If you feel that the weeds around you are being pushy you have to politely but firmly move them away.”

“I can understand how you want more sunlight and water, young Rose, but the gardener knows what is best for you to grow up to become a strong and beautiful bush. If it was always sunny it would never rain, and you would get scorched and wither up. If it rained

a lot you would get lazy and never dig your roots deep. You know, sometimes I have to blow by very fast, and if you don't have good roots you might get pulled up. The gardener knows all these things, and wants you to be strong as well as have beautiful flowers."

"I can also see that it could be very lonely in that big field with no other flowers around you. But if we ask the gardener I'm sure that he will put other nice plants near you or perhaps transplant you. Many of his gardens are alongside bubbling brooks, and if you can learn to live next to the other flowers you will never be thirsty again. But Rose, before we ask him to transplant you, you must understand what you are asking for. He knows the best place to put you, but you might not agree! You might not like some of your neighbors because they look different and grow differently. For example, he might plant you beside some sunflowers, these big stalky things that send their roots down everywhere. You have no idea how fearful some plants are that their roots may get hurt! They have to learn how to grow together and mingle their roots, but many plants don't trust the gardener's choice of neighbors for them. Even fewer trust the plants themselves, even though the gardener is taking just as much care of them to make sure that they are also growing correctly."

"Rose, I am going to tell you a very important story that may help you to grow much better. Wherever I go I tell this story, but I often only gently whisper it because it is a very wonderful story that many do not appreciate. I am sure you have already heard some of this story, but you young plants forget things so quickly."

"Many years ago the Lord of these lands had a son who was outstanding in all that he did. His son became a noble soldier and commander, a wise businessman, and an amazing scholar. But while he was home with his father what he most enjoyed was being the family gardener."

"The Lord wanted his son to know how to best take care of all the different plants and flowers, so one day as we were talking together, we designed a most wondrous plan. With my help, the Lord caused his son to become a plant! The son learned about all the problems you plants have as he grew up just like yourselves. I can tell you many stories about him if you want me to. Then you would understand better that he does fully know how to help you to properly grow. This is because he went through the same struggles himself! You think that you have gone through difficulties with dry ground and bad companions, but you have no idea what the gardener experienced when he was a plant! Let me tell you a little of one story that I wrote about this:

“Who has believed our message? And to whom has he been revealed? For he grew up as a tender plant, sprouting from a root out of dry ground. There was nothing beautiful or majestic about his appearance, nothing to attract us to him. He was despised and rejected, full of sorrows, and well acquainted with grief. We turned away from him and didn’t care even though it was our grief that he carried, and our sorrows that weighed him down. Yet it was the Lord’s good plan to crush him. He was cut off from life, yet after his suffering he will live again and be given great honor and reward. He will see his seed and prolong his days, and the Lord’s plan will prosper in his hands.”

At this point Rose interrupted Wind and said, “Sir, you have just mentioned one of the things that I struggle the most about. How can it be good for a plant to die? Just last week there was an Easter lily that was growing on the other side of this field. When it had just come into full bloom and was ready to enjoy itself, the gardener came along and cut it down! The rumors are that the dying lily was placed in the Lord’s house in a vase, where it was enjoyed for a few days and then thrown out with the garbage. It doesn’t seem fair to me that the Lord would cut down the lily, not to mention what you just told me about the gardener himself having been cut down to die.”

“Young Rose, there are so many things that you are not yet able to understand. What you heard about the lily was mostly true. However, you do not understand about the goodness of the Lord. First of all, that Easter lily was specially grown to bring beauty to the Lord’s house, even though it was only for a short time. But when its wilted flower was thrown away, that was not the end of the story. The lily’s bulb is safe in the ground, and after the winter it will be replanted in the gardens of the Lord. This is not the end of the lily; it is only the preparation for a much better life that is yet to come. The gardener experienced these things for himself so that he could very tenderly take care of all the plants and flowers that would be chosen for the Lord’s gardens.”

“Young Rose, you worry about many things that you do not have to fully understand. You do not yet have the wisdom and knowledge to be able to clear up all your struggles, and the more you look at them, the problems only seem to get bigger. I would encourage you to take your eyes off of yourself, and put your trust in the gardener. He knows more about you than you do yourself! He is very tender and compassionate, not wanting any to perish or become stunted in their growth. You have a wonderful purpose to your life, for you are to join the glory of your Lord’s gardens where everlasting beauty will crown all of your days. But first you must grow and become prepared. So keep listening to me when I blow past you, and I am sure that with my help you will grow up to be among the most beautiful in the land.”

After a time of silence, Rose replied, "Dear Wind, thank you so much for coming down to encourage me. I know that life isn't all that bad; it's just that sometimes I get looking at all my problems and become so discouraged. Please come talk with me every day. Now I feel that, with your help, I can grow strong and big and become all that I was meant to be."

"Yes, dear Rose, that is the way it will come to pass. With my help you can rest assured that you will live well and grow true. Although I am usually unnoticed, I am always here, and as you breathe me, I am in you. Keep thinking about what I have told you and I am sure that you will perk up and grow faster than you can imagine."

Rose replied, "Thank you, dear Wind. I hope that we will become the best of friends."

"I hope so also" said Wind, as he blew onward to continue his journey.

# The Invitation

From the High Country I've come to you to tell  
you of a peaceful kingdom, where a happy people dwell.  
My name is John, I'm a shepherd, though I used to fish at the sea  
Until a friend invited me to live in the High Country.

High up in the mountains a peaceful kingdom lies  
Amidst the hills and valleys and beneath the clear blue skies.  
But high upon a hill there stands the city of our King  
Where all his faithful servants live, and where his minstrels sing!

But now I must go on and tell a little history  
About the ruler of the kingdom and his family.  
Years ago the Lord decided that he would choose someone  
To join the royal family as the bride of his son.

A daughter from a royal line was sought throughout the land  
But no one worthy could be found to take the bridegroom's hand.  
And so a peasant girl was chosen from the countryside  
With nothing to commend herself to be the royal bride.

She was adorned with gold and silver, fed with oil and milk

Clothed with fine embroidered cloth, and linen, and with silk.  
But she trusted in her fame and beauty and she played the whore  
And gave gift to her lovers to entice them to her door!

Despised and rejected, the son's heart then broke  
"Depart ye from the kingdom!" the angry father spoke.  
The peasant girl was cast out to live in sin and shame  
To wander endlessly with no one but herself to blame.

And as the years went on, and as the son is now our king  
No one worthy still was found to bear his wedding ring.  
Yet still remembering the first love of his broken heart  
Our king sent out his heralds on a search that they must start:

"Go through all the kingdoms! Ride each highway, search each town  
See if you can find the one who almost shared my crown.  
Has she learned the error of her former sinful ways?  
Though not worthy, could she now be faithful all her days?"

So the heralds of the High Country searched through all the lands  
Telling of the mercy of our king, with his still outstretched hands.  
Through the highways and the byways, in each city, town, and house  
Went the search and invitation that has found the king his spouse!

So now I can go on and tell you all of the good news

About an invitation which I hope you won't refuse.

All has been made ready for the wedding and the feast

Everyone's invited from the greatest to the least.

Do you hear the trumpets blowing? They're proclaiming far and wide

That the Bridegroom is waiting to take to wife his bride!

If you will decide right now, you can make it there on time

Don't turn back for your purse, he freely gives his bread and wine.

Don't turn back for your purse, he freely gives his bread and wine.



## Plundering the Prince

“Halt!” boomed the voice of the guard. “Who would dare to enter the royal throne room uninvited?”

“I do,” replied the soft-spoken visitor, as he walked towards the throne.

“Leave him alone” replied the prince as he sat there, looking disturbed. “I can see from his robe that he bears the protection of his king. And for what purpose have you intruded upon my domain?”

“Too long have your predatory raids upon our people gone unchecked” the visitor announced. “I have come to reclaim of the treasures that you have stolen from us.”

“Stolen!” the prince replied with mock surprise. “I have never stolen anything. Your own people have willingly given me gifts from their valuables.”

“When your sorceries have blinded their minds, and your false promises would cause them to renounce their very birthrights, the word ‘stolen’ is legally correct” declared the visitor.

“Your king always speaks with a commanding voice, and I can see that he has trained you to do the same. But does your Thunderer think his words will prevail? Many of your own people have grown tired of his laws, and no longer own a heart allegiance to his cause. Soon our forces will sweep away your kingdom just like a blow will crush rotten wood. Then-”

The visitor cut him short and said “-It is *your* treacheries that have sought to corrupt our people. You see their outer weakness, but your arrogance keeps you from seeing the inner strength of the faithful servants of my Lord. This may be your hour of dominion, but your time will soon be over.”

“Don’t be so hasty, my impertinent guest” replied the prince. “Since the beginning of the kingdoms my Overlord has always ruled here. While your Thunderer may still reign in the Upper Lands, our future plans are to change even that.”

“I have not been sent here to listen to your empty boasts. Hear now my commission which has brought me to your throne room- the words of power from the Highest King whom you would mock.” Opening the scroll that had been sealed with the stamp of the Highest, the visitor declared, “The spirit of the Lord is upon me, for the Lord has anointed me to set the captives

free. He has sent me to open the prison doors and cause the blind to see. He has sent me to bind princes with chains of iron and execute the judgments that have been written.”

Pointing to the throne, he went on to say “And now, prince of darkness, in the name of the Highest I bind your power and plunder your stolen treasures which you display like trophies here in your throne room.” Saying that, he walked past the immobilized guards to examine the stolen treasures.

Picking up a bottle filled with golden oil, he declared “I first reclaim, as the heritage of our people, this vial of oil for healing the sick. The elders shall now again remember and use this valuable gift from their king.”

Taking a picture from off the wall, the ambassador next said, “This picture portrays the soon return of my king to these Lower Lands. You have stolen this remembrance, confused the minds of our people, and even caused many to follow false pretenders who claim to be the returned king. I take this picture back, and declare that the people of the Highest will again understand and await his return.”

Picking up a bag of gold and precious jewels, he went on to say, “I also reclaim these treasures that you have stolen from our people. Our people will no longer struggle to build with wood and straw and have poverty among us.”

Taking a jar to finish his collection, the ambassador said “This eye salve will again heal the blindness of our people. No longer will they think that evil is good, and that the blind still see, and that the poor are rich. They will again turn back to their king to follow his ways and regain his blessings.”

“NOOOOOO!” cried the prince. “You will pay for your thievery! Have I not caused thousands to stumble and fall?”

“Though a thousand may fall at my side, and ten thousand at my right hand, it will not come near me” replied the visitor.

“You will pay, you will all pay!” yelled the prince. “Is not my power quickly growing?”

“Your time is quickly ending” was the quiet reply. Then the last words spoken were, “This mission is completed; this vision will cease.”

## SILENCE IN HEAVEN

There was silence in heaven the day Jesus died

There was darkness on earth as the sun chose to hide

Both heaven and earth together stood still

When Christ hung on Calvary's hill

The demons all cried out, "At last we have won,

The prince of life has been overcome!

The lion of Judah's defeated in shame

He is only a lamb to be slain!"

Seraphim! Hosts of angels! Fold your wings in humility!

The Son of God goes to battle crucified on Calvary!

The Pharisees mocked and said, "If you're God's Son

Come down from the cross and we'll know you're the one"

They could not see or understand

The redemption that God had planned

When Jesus cried, "Father, you've forsaken me"

As he suffered there on Calvary's tree

He took all the sin of the world and its shame  
And became the lamb that was slain!  
Seraphim! Hosts of angels! Fold your wings in humility!  
The Son of God wins the battle crucified on Calvary!

For this was God's own plan  
To rescue sinful man...

For Christ had not failed when he laid down his life  
He had offered to God the supreme sacrifice  
The sinless one suffered in sinful man's place  
That we can be saved by grace

He descended to hell, but he rose the third day  
As a conquering king he has opened the way  
He has taken the keys of both hell and the grave  
Christ the king, strong and mighty to save!

Seraphim! Hosts of angels! Fold your wings in humility!  
The Son of God won the battle crucified on Calvary!

Today Christ's disciples have spread through the earth  
Declaring salvation and preaching rebirth

But to be Christ's ambassadors we must first die

Our flesh must be crucified

We must carry our cross as lambs to be slain

To become kings and priests who with Christ will reign

For the lions of Judah must first pay the price

As lambs to be sacrificed

Seraphim! Hosts of angels! Fold your wings in humility!

The Sons of God go to battle crucified on Calvary!

## BEFORE THE FINAL ADVANCE

The Commander-in-Chief of our Armed Forces is indeed very wise. He had seen that everything was going according to plan. True, the enemy forces had swept in like a flood many years ago. For a while it seemed as though they would reign supreme. Yet our Commander had been able to concentrate his loyal troops in the most strategic positions, maintain his defenses, and wait patiently. As he had expected, the enemy forces did not continue to press the attack. Instead their greed started to divide them in the midst of their success. Then they lost the favor of many of the people through their corruption. And then the Commander knew it was time to counter-attack.

In successive waves our army was able to roll back the forces of the enemy. The last offensive was by far the most successful. Our Commander had prepared well. He had spent years training the troops. He had hand-picked the placement of the battalions before the attack, and the territory that they had been able to regain was beyond the dreams of many of the soldiers.

As they conquered new areas, many of the liberated people volunteered to join the army as our Commander arrived and they saw him in the day of his power. Our ranks swelled quickly. Then we all began to see the wisdom behind each soldiers' extensive training. With all the new recruits, many of the privates found themselves being promoted to become sergeants and lieutenants. All the officers began to jump up the ranks. Though it surprised us all, on one day three of our best captains were promoted to be generals! As the liberation continued, even many of the new recruits were chosen to become officers although they lacked the proper training. Yet even as the offensive continued to prosper beyond our wildest expectations, the problems began to increase and our Commander felt it was time to stop the advance.

The problems came in many ways. One difficulty was that some of the front line troops had advanced so far, that they were not properly maintaining their supply lines and their communications with headquarters. In the midst of their celebrations, they suddenly found themselves short of food and supplies when the enemy counterattacked. Then instead of waiting to get instructions from headquarters, some of the front-line officers began to give the craziest of orders, and some units even ended up shooting at each other in the confusion!

In the advance, there were also many areas where the front-line troops had become too thinly spaced. Of course the soldiers like to stay together in the well developed, comfortable camps. Nobody likes duty out on the lonely patrols! And then there was the problem that some of our units which had achieved the greatest successes became so overconfident that they did not even post the needed guards. So the enemy began to probe our weak areas. Then they broke through our lines where we least expected it, isolated a number of platoons and divisions, and wiped them out. It was only in the areas where the troops had learned to work closely together in unity that the enemy found these tactics to be useless.

We also began to have some problems with troop morale. Some of the officers and their men became jealous of the others who had looked more successful in the last advance. Many of these officers had been given the most difficult positions to hold, and had fought the hardest battles. But because they had only been able to advance very slowly while other battalions were liberating large areas, they complained about how the other troops were being praised for their success while they were being ignored. Well, the Commander personally talked to these men who were beginning to sow the discord. He explained how he had personally picked his best men to attack the most difficult enemy positions. While their valiant efforts had not looked as successful as the other battalions, the Commander congratulated them for being the soldiers who had paralyzed the true strength of the enemy. He even confided in them that he had often given the least capable troops the greatest victories by positioning them in the weakest places of the enemy defenses. This was because he knew the limitations of his own troops, and that if they had been entrusted with the more difficult battles they would have broken ranks and retreated with great losses. So to encourage them, the weakest troops were often allowed to have the easiest battles and gain the most obvious victories. Yet even after this personal talk, some of the officers and their men kept their bitterness and began to exalt themselves by talking of starting some reforms. It was clear that they valued the praise of the people more than the praise of their Commander-in-Chief.

There were also problems with some of the new recruits who had quickly been promoted to become officers. They were usually very zealous, brave, and hard working. But their lack of training and experience caused them to do many foolish things, and too many of them fell in the battle or led their troops into public disgrace.

Thankfully, our Commander-in-Chief was not unprepared for all these difficulties. They were common problems to all the previous advances he had led the armed forces in. But for many of us soldiers, we had not expected these things at all! Just when the Liberation was going ahead at full speed, and we were ready to press on and win the whole war, we received orders to slow down. In some areas our advance stopped, while in other places

we even retreated a little to more easily defended positions. We soon found out the wisdom to all that when the problems began to surface! And then when the enemy counterattacked, we found out that he was not as weak as we sometimes presumed him to be. Had we gone much farther or much faster, we now see that it would have been to our own destruction. But the Commander knew that we needed to regroup and prepare for what has now been named "Operation Final Advance".

Some of the troops are starting to hear about the new orders that are coming down the chain of command. While some of the battalions are still moving forward from the last advance, the message of the hour seems to be that we need to prepare for what's ahead. The supplies are all being built up, and strengthening the communications network has been given top priority.

Lists of names are also being prepared for those who will be promoted up the ranks for the Final Advance. It has been said that the Commander is looking for faithful men of character who can be trusted for the battles ahead. He was quoted as having wisely said, "It is not enough for you to be able to take a city- are you slow to anger and can you control your attitudes?" The rumors say that some of the officers will also be demoted. In the last great offensive, some of those who gained the greatest victories became proud and independent. They have not maintained discipline and prepared for the greater battles that are ahead, so the rumors say that others will be entrusted to get the job done.

Everyone is starting to feel that Operation Final Advance is going to begin shortly. Headquarters has not revealed the exact time yet, but the troops are all becoming ready. Anticipation is getting high. After all these years, the Liberation will shortly be finished! We only await the word of our Commander-in-Chief to begin.



## ROSE OF SHARON

Rose of Sharon, plant your love in me

Break up the fallow ground, prepare it thoroughly

Rose of Sharon, deeply plant your root

For out of dry ground you must send your tender shoot

So spring up within my soul

That your life in me may be seen

Although you start small, you soon will grow tall

And cover all my barren ground with green

Rose of Sharon, I will bear the agony

Of your thorns so sharp, that your blooms may grow in me

So Rose of Sharon, bloom that everyone may see

Not my sufferings, but your blood-red beauty

For after the pain comes the joy

Of knowing your love made complete

Through the anguish in my soul, others will be made whole

By the fragrance of your blood-red blooms, so sweet

# My Doctor

I think my doctor is the best in the world. If you listen to very many stories from his patients, you might start to think that the guy can work miracles- it's amazing the kinds of sicknesses that he has cured! I follow most of his recommendations very carefully. I have my daily morning exercise, go to his clinic regularly, and religiously follow his advice. However, while I think he's the best, I of course don't think he's cornered the market on wisdom. There are specifically two things that I take exception to.

First, there are things in my diet that he warns me will be the death of me. However, I feel very healthy, and by following his advice in most things, I think my quality of life is far above many of the people I know. So what if I sneak in some things to my diet that he doesn't like? After all, you can't live forever!

The other thing that troubles me at times is that he says I have a fatal disease, something that people get from their genetic bloodline. He's told me the name, but to me it's just medical jargon. Some of my friends at work have heard of it, but most of them say that the sickness is only a benign nuisance, really nothing to be worried about at all. Several even offered me their opinion that this disease has never been properly scientifically proven, and that it was probably dreamed up by some quack doctor who wanted to scare his patients and get them to spend all their money on an imaginary cure.

However, Doc has a very different take on the situation. He said that without a total blood transfusion, regular therapy, and a strict diet, I'm a goner. But my friends at work also know people who have tried the same treatment and have backed out, saying it would be better to die than suffer through the cure! Their stories have spooked me out, I'm definitely not going to submit to my Doc's recommendations on this situation.

But like I said, I still think he's the best doctor in the world. And as I also already mentioned, because I usually follow his advice I have a quality of life above most of my friends. So what if I enjoy eating some things that are sinfully delicious? And what if he's wrong about how dangerous the genetic thing in my blood is? While I think it's part of a doctor's job description to nag his patients, I also think it's part of *my* job description to follow what I think is important, and ignore the rest. After all, I'm in charge of my own life, and I'm gonna enjoy being in charge until the day I die.

## The Triune Call

Oh child, why are you lonely and filled with fears?  
I know you're full of guilt from all those wasted years.  
It doesn't matter just what you've done  
I want to adopt you, and have you to be my own son.

Oh stranger, I can tell that you really need a good friend  
I offer myself to you as someone you can depend.  
If you want, I'll make a pact with you  
I'll be your blood brother, if you will just ask me to.

Oh faithless, you've searched for your lovers far and wide  
But faithful I still remain, and ask you, "Be my bride."  
I want to make you my very own  
I'll give you a new name and a new home  
I will give my very life to you  
If you will say those simple words, "I do."

The Father, Son, and Spirit am I  
As Father I loved you, as Son I came to die  
That as the Spirit I can give you my life  
And you can be my son and brother, and my wife

So heed my call and respond to my heart  
And I will give you now a brand new start  
All orphans, strangers and unfaithful can see  
Their lives restored to how things were meant to be

The Father, Son, and Spirit am I  
As Father I loved you, as Son I came to die  
That as the Spirit I can give you my life  
And you can be my son and brother, and my wife