

Focus on the Kingdom

Vol. 14 No. 7

Anthony Buzzard, editor

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21st Theological Conference

May 3-6, 2012

Simpsonwood Conference Center, Norcross, GA

Registration deadline April 13

We are not far from our 21st annual “Theological Conference.” (Do not for a moment let that title deter you. “Theology” has become a dirty word in some circles, but is only the study of God and His will.) Do come, and bring your friends.

As I revisit some of the remarkable and very moving faith stories presented over the years, I am impressed with all the good things that have been reported by those from all parts of the world who have attended. Now that we have the amazing gift of Internet technology, the talents of skilled believers allow us to film the proceedings for posterity. This enables the work of the conference to be *permanently* available on websites. The fruits of the conference stretch far beyond the brief time we have together at Simpsonwood. Please join this team effort. **This year Dr. Dale Tuggy, Professor of Philosophy at The State University of New York (SUNY Fredonia) and a committed unitarian, has agreed to be among our speakers.**

The fact is that fellowship with others of the same faith is a vital necessity for our communal and individual growth. Please *do* make the effort (and sacrifice) to bless us with your presence.

Some may wish to be baptized. Baptisms in the scenic river close to Simpsonwood have always been moving occasions for us all. You may wish to give your “faith story.” Some of you will be meeting fellow unitary monotheists, Gospel of the Kingdom believers for the first time. Others will renew long-held friendships. We do hope that you will be able to make the trip and be inspired by the various speakers.

Our emphasis is on presenting the faith to the world as our necessary participation in the Great Commission given us by Jesus. The Kingdom of God must be preached worldwide, Jesus said, and only then will the end come (Matt. 24:14). We need to consider our individual part in that effort. The arrival of the tool of the Internet makes Matthew 24:14 possible in a brand new way. We have exciting new websites to report, and a gifted younger generation is adding their skills to the important issue of making public the saving truths we

hold in common. Also, my 10-minute video “Jesus is Still a Jew” at youtube.com now has about 75 pages of comment in the form of concise statements of our common beliefs. Along with huge increase of public exposure, “Abrahamics” are increasing their influence, but we need to do much more. The Great Commission remains a large task! The opposition is daunting, making our effort a kind of David and Goliath exercise!

To register please call Atlanta Bible College at 800-347-4261 or 678-833-1839 or mail the form on the back page by **April 13**. The non-refundable deposit is \$50 per individual or couple.

Registration deadline: April 13

Conference Cost

Includes 3 nights, all meals, snacks, conf. fee, and tax

Single	Couple Rate	Double (per person)	Triple (per person)	Quad (per person)
\$340	\$505 per couple	\$260	\$245	\$230

Transportation (Judy: 678-485-8492)

We will provide transportation between Atlanta airport and Simpsonwood for \$25 round-trip or \$15 one-way, at the following times:

Airport to Simpsonwood		
Thurs, May 3	1:00 pm	3:30 pm
Simpsonwood to Airport		
Sun., May 6	1:00 pm	

Please arrange your arrival time on Thursday early enough to catch one of the two shuttle runs. On Sunday, May 6, we will provide 1 shuttle run. In order to allow you enough time to catch your return flight, we suggest you **not book your return flight prior to 3:30 p.m.**

The conference begins with registration at 4 pm on Thursday and ends with lunch on Sunday. Driving directions to Simpsonwood Conference Center are at www.simpsonwood.org The address is 4511 Jones Bridge Circle NW, Norcross, GA 30092.

From Professor Scot McKnight:

On the Internet there appears a wonderfully refreshing remark from a well-known NT scholar about how Jesus is absent from the typical evangelical Gospel tract. (The prof. is not connected to our magazine, but his blog is interesting.) We read this:

“The most influential piece of literature in the twentieth century was the gospel tract. Why? Because it reduced the gospel to sound bytes and because it has framed how many Christians now understand the gospel message. **What might surprise us is that the central idea of Jesus’ teaching — the coming Kingdom of God — does not appear in any of the gospel tracts.** Why is that? Have we only relied on Paul’s version of the gospel? Is it possible, many are asking, to combine the gospel of Paul with the gospel of Jesus? Which leads to this question: What is the gospel? And to this one: Did Jesus himself preach the gospel or not?”

My Answer to This Excellent Question

I trust that our readers will be more than surprised! Shocked and stunned and provoked to action would be a good response, I suggest.

It has become an entrenched belief that Jesus offered salvation to all who believe that he died for them and was resurrected. This is not, positively not, what Jesus taught as the saving Gospel. Bible readers have an annoying tendency to rely on a few “sound bytes” drawn from isolated verses of Paul. But Paul would have been shocked at the idea that he, and not Jesus, was the author of the Gospel!

In all attempts at learning, we begin at the beginning. Hebrews 2:3 says it beautifully: Jesus was the original preacher of the Gospel. Hebrews 5:9 echoes Jesus’ stern warning that disobedience to Jesus’ words is a fatal trap. Salvation is given to those who obey Jesus.

Yes, there it is: “Salvation is given to those who obey Jesus” (Heb. 5:9). Jesus put it this way: “He who believes in the Son has life, but he who **disobeys the Son** will not see life, but the wrath of God remains upon him” (John 3:36). These are simple but much neglected propositions. Biblical Christianity begins by asking us to respond obediently to Jesus’ word of command. He calls us to intelligent belief in and obedience to “God’s Gospel about the Kingdom of God” (Mark 1:14-15). Paul uses that wonderful phrase to frame the book of Romans: “the obedience of faith” (Rom. 1:5; 16:26).

It is an illusion to imagine that salvation can be gained by refusing to listen *first* to the words of Jesus! Listen to the impassioned cry of Jesus in John 12:48: “The one who rejects me and does not receive my words has a judge; the word that I have spoken will judge him

on the last day.” That really is a marvelously clear final summing up of all Jesus said and says to us.

Jesus came before Paul! And Jesus was preceded by the whole Hebrew Bible (75% of Scripture). And the Hebrew Bible had seen the Gospel in advance. Paul noted with complete accuracy that **the Gospel** had been announced ahead of time to Abraham (Gal. 3:8). (Invite your pastor to do a series of sermons on what that Gospel to Abraham was — it is a fascinating subject and affects your destiny directly.) The Gospel has its foundation in the land promise made to Abraham (Gen. 12, 13, 15, 17 and note Gen. 28:4 which defines the blessing promised to Abraham: Gal. 3:14=Gen. 28:4). Jesus said exactly that when he promised the meek (as his followers are to be) the earth: “Blessed are the meek; they are going to inherit the land, the earth” (Matt. 5:5, quoting Ps. 37 which repeats this 5 times!).

The promise to Abraham in Romans is exactly that, too. “The promise to Abraham that he would be heir of the world” (Rom. 4:13) was not based on Mosaic law, or even keeping a Jewish calendar or food laws, but on believing and obeying the promises made to Abraham, and repeated by Jesus and Paul. There is only one Gospel and it has a label: **The Gospel about the Kingdom of God.** The land promise to Abraham and to his seed is now the Kingdom of God promise to the international church, the true Israel of God (Gal. 6:16), as distinct from national Israel whom Paul calls “the Israel of the flesh” (1 Cor. 10:18).

Jesus is not the Gospel! A person is not a Kingdom

A clever but vague expression that “Jesus *is* the Gospel” sounds good but is not true to the Bible. It is impressive but unclear and dates from the very philosophical mind of Origen, the author of “eternal generation of the Son” (which later helped to develop the Trinitarian idea of God). Origen said that “today” for God is timeless (cp. Ps 2:7). He said that God did not beget His Son in time, “today,” because “today” with God does not mean “today”! With this demolition of easy words the Church departed into “waffleland.” Origen also expected that every human being would be saved. He said that Jesus is the “self-Kingdom” (*autobasileia* in Greek). This is too vague to be useful. “Jesus *is* the Kingdom” is as foggy as “Jesus *is* the Gospel.”

Search the Gospel Question

Test the Gospel question this way with your friends: Did Jesus come into Galilee and say, “Repent because I am at hand”? No. Did Jesus say, “Repent and believe that I came to die for your sins and rise from the dead”? Obviously and emphatically not! Jesus did not *begin* at all with his death and resurrection. And he spoke of the Kingdom as a real Kingdom to come, asking us to pray “Your Kingdom come”!

To define the Kingdom you may want to start with Luke 19:11ff and then add perhaps (besides hundreds of verses) Luke 21:31. The Kingdom of God is predominantly the great revolution in world government to be brought about by the return of Jesus to the earth (**Rev. 11:15-18**). Teaching the Gospel of the Kingdom takes many hours as we see from Paul's example in Acts (19:8; 20:25; 28:23, 31).

Paul of course was a true follower and Apostle, agent of Jesus. To test this point please examine the careful documentation of Luke who struggled (but is anyone listening?) to keep the **defining label of the Gospel as the Gospel of the Kingdom**, always before our eyes and in our minds. Before being certain you understand the Gospel please refer to Acts 19:8. We will find with complete clarity the easy fact that Paul's labor of love for the Gospel consisted in **announcing the Kingdom of God**. In this of course he was obediently carrying out Jesus' instructions (Matt. 28:19-20).

We all surely know that Jesus gave his marching orders to the Church. They were to preach the Gospel, that is the Gospel of the Kingdom, internationally. Jesus then added the stupendous promise that he would be with those who carried out this international preaching of the Gospel of the Kingdom until the end of the age. The end of the age of course is the time when Jesus returns in power and glory to inaugurate the Kingdom of God worldwide. For all this see the final words of Jesus in Matthew 28:19-20.

The gospel has been so subjectivized and individualized. It has been reduced to a vague "acceptance of Jesus," taking him into your heart (whatever that is supposed to mean precisely) in the absence of a clear definition of *what it is one is being asked to believe*. The right method in all Gospel preaching is to **begin** with Jesus. And beginning with Jesus means listening to his words.

Why not take Jesus as our mentor in evangelism? What was Jesus' first command? To find out we go to the beginning of the accounts of his ministry. Matthew, Mark and Luke leave us without a shadow of doubt. These are easy truths around which unity can be built. Both John the Baptist and Jesus after him had a clear-cut message to deliver to the public, and we are part of that public. They both announced that the Kingdom of God, or Kingdom of Heaven — there is absolutely no difference in meaning — was at hand. They did not say the Kingdom of God has arrived and was just to be in your heart. They announced what the prophets of Israel had long announced: that God was going to intervene — as it turns out in the person of His supreme agent the Messiah — and that a world revolution is coming. It will be a new world regime which will bring peace to the nations, the peace that has so evidently eluded us for so long as a human race. The first

step in salvation is committing oneself, by a radical change of mind and life, to **believe** in this tremendous proposition about the Kingdom of God to come with the Messiah — at his future arrival in power and glory. It is hope for the world and for us of course as individuals, too.

It goes without saying that the atoning and substitutionary death of Jesus on the cross and his return to life after 3 days (on the third day, Luke 24:21) is an essential part of the Gospel message. But it is only a part of it. It is customary, but treacherous, to pit Paul against Jesus in 1 Corinthians 15:1-3. But Paul said that he preached the death and resurrection of Jesus as **part** of the Gospel (*en protois*, among items of first importance). If you use 1 Corinthians 15:1-3 as a blanket definition of the Gospel you contradict Jesus and you contradict Paul in Acts (19:8; 20:25; 28:23, 31). Paul did not say that the death and resurrection of Jesus was the whole of the Gospel. Nor in Romans 10 did he contradict Jesus by making the Gospel anything other than believing the Gospel Message of Christ (Rom. 10:17). Paul said in Romans 10:14 that we must hear Jesus, i.e. hear him preaching, to get saved — not as mistranslated in the NIV just hear *of* him, or about him (see ASV and NASU).

The death and resurrection of Jesus were not the primary concern of Jesus' Gospel preaching. He did of course speak of his death and resurrection later, beginning only in Matthew 16:21. His first aim was to establish himself as the Messiah and to command belief in the future world revolution which he will bring into being at the seventh trumpet: the Kingdom of God worldwide (Rev. 11:15-18; Luke 19:11ff, 21:31). When that happens, the saints of all the ages will rise from the sleep of death, be changed in the twinkling of an eye and given immortality, indestructible life. They will then be empowered to "fix the world" along with Jesus. They will certainly not sit under a fig tree and gaze at the sky all day long! There will be a huge task to be performed, and the Christian life now is preparation, by way of the development of our various talents and the use of our various opportunities, for that great day coming.

Note well that the kingdoms of this present world system *become* the Kingdom of God only at the future seventh trumpet. It is a disaster to confuse the present evil systems with the Kingdom of God. Jesus and God *begin* to reign fully in future (Rev. 11:15-18). At present Revelation 12:9 says that the Devil is deceiving the whole world. In 1 Corinthians 4:8 Paul warned believers *not* to think they are reigning with Jesus now! No text says that Christians have already inherited the Kingdom. The Kingdom is the hope of our inheritance (Col. 3:24).

A professor at a well-known theological school recently noted that what we call the gospel in popular

evangelical circles is so small a fragment of the real gospel that it is barely recognizable. Surely this lamentable situation can be changed. But a change will not take place unless as churches we give ourselves wholeheartedly to the study of what Jesus and Paul preached as gospel.

This may well entail a reduction in the singing element of church (singing of course is wonderful) and an increase in the time spent in learning, preferably with interaction from those who sit and listen. Do not people learn best by some interaction, and did not Jesus ask brilliant and searching questions of his audience? Did not Jesus teach the Gospel in the temple daily, starting early in the morning?

If you will follow the **Kingdom texts** in the book of Acts, starting with Acts 19:8 you will see with clarity that Paul preached exactly the same message as Gospel as Jesus his Lord and Rabbi had preached. Strikingly important is Paul's own account of his ministry. In Acts 20 Paul summoned some elders of the church (elders are the same rank as pastors, bishops, overseers in the New Testament). In an effort to impress upon them their duty as exponents of the Gospel of salvation, the Gospel of the Kingdom, Paul noted that he had labored among them to announce "the gospel of the grace of God" (Acts 20:24).

To my astonishment I have sat through lectures and read countless articles on the Gospel which cite Acts 20:24 and then fail to read verse 25, **which defines what the gospel of the grace of God is: the gospel of the Kingdom of God.** Is this a curious unconscious embarrassment over our failure to define the Gospel properly? Are we so overwhelmed by tradition and tract, which leave out mention of Jesus' own Gospel of the Kingdom? The churchgoing public seems to be fixated on a "personal salvation" guaranteeing the continuation of an immortal soul in heaven at death. But these ideas take their origin in a post-biblical paganism. It is an easy matter to see through this "guttled" gospel.

The really important issue for congregations is that they fully grasp the Gospel of the Kingdom as Jesus preached it. Only then can we avert the threat of being found lacking in loyalty to the words and teachings of Jesus. We might take this solemn saying of Jesus as a fair warning: "He who is ashamed of me and my gospel, I will be ashamed of him" when I return (Mark 8:38). No greater disaster can occur than a separation of Jesus from his words. This creates another Jesus of our "pious" imagination.

Returning to the book of Acts to ensure that we have understood Paul's preaching of the Gospel correctly, turn to Acts 28:23. When Jews arranged a time with Paul he proclaimed the one and only Gospel of the Kingdom of God to them, warning those who did not believe in the Messiah who had come, and his Gospel of the Kingdom,

that they were responsible for the information he had conveyed to them. There is a note of irony in Paul's pointing out that Gentiles would be more receptive to the Messiah and the Kingdom Gospel. Some of them were persuaded, which is defined as believing. It was an exercise in persuasion by the powerful, logical, scriptural appeal of Paul. Paul was carrying out the Master's orders, as we should, to announce the Gospel of the Kingdom far and wide.

Do sermons in church follow the tight, logical, scriptural exposition of Paul? Paul is our model preacher, as was Jesus. Are church members equipped in church to do "the work of ministry" as Paul advised?

The Gospel message announces that the Kingdom is coming; get ready to take part in what is to be your inheritance granted by the Father acting in Christ. Peter was profoundly interested in *the point* of salvation (Matt. 19:27). He and his colleagues had been harassed by the established "church" and accused wrongly of aligning themselves with a false Messiah. We who have accepted Jesus as the true Messiah, the Son of God by miracle in the womb of his mother (Luke 1:35), must be equally inquisitive about what God has promised for our future. On condition of our obedience — grace does not mean we can live our lives just as we please — we can relate to the promise made to Peter by Jesus: "When the world is reborn, when the Son of Man will sit on his throne of glory [in Jerusalem], you too will be promoted to sit on thrones administering the 12 tribes of Israel" (Matt. 19:28). The same promise is made in Luke 22:28-30. Jesus **covenants** the Kingdom to his followers just as God covenanted the Kingdom to Jesus. ("Grant" is a bit weak; the word is "**covenant.**") The New Covenant is all about the Kingdom.

Have you heard sermons on this definite statement of Jesus in Matthew 19:28 about Christian hope? Why not request them? Faith and love *are based on* hope. What if hope is fuzzy? (Col. 1:4-5). Hope is the second great Christian virtue.

What a far cry this is from the indeterminate foggy promise of a disembodied existence in heaven. All of us, I suppose, who love our fellow human beings would love to see everyone have an abundant life. How very untrue this is today of the lives of millions of human beings. But all that is going to change when Jesus takes over the reins of government and rules from Jerusalem. The nations will beat their tanks into tractors, and no one will be permitted to kill other human beings (Isa. 2:1-4). This is the heart of the Gospel of the Kingdom and with this prospect Jesus opens his ministry, as had John the Baptist before him. With this Gospel of the Kingdom Paul defines his whole ministry and mission (Acts 20:24-25). Jesus defined it in the same language in Luke 4:43, **the great purpose statement.**

An early **creedal statement** in Acts 8:12 provides an easy summary of the essence of the Christian faith. It shows what those early Christians were required to believe before submitting themselves to necessary water baptism. Acts 8, the whole chapter, is a delightful, concise statement of early Christianity. In 8:4 they went out “preaching the word.” But what is meant by “the word”? Our readers should leave no stone unturned until they have determined what “the word” means. The next verse (v. 5) informs us that in preaching the word as gospel they were “preaching Christ.” But what does it mean to “preach Christ”? Luke leaves us in no doubt and there are few verses in Scripture which so beautifully summarize what needs to be believed before we embark on the journey of faith that leads to the Kingdom. We read “when they believed Philip” — they understood and embraced his message — “about the **Kingdom of God and the things concerning Jesus**, then they were ready to get baptized [in water, of course], both men and women” (Acts 8:12).

It is a common problem today that people seem unaware of their destiny and inheritance in the Kingdom. Again it is the overwhelming power of what we call Christian culture, influenced often by popular music and tracts, which causes our problems. In the book of Revelation Jesus promised his followers, those who faithfully endure to the end and have developed their talents in the service of Christ, that they will have “power over the nations” (Rev. 2:26), including the power of discipline. Which of us has escaped discipline from God? None. By this we know that God loves us and wants us to be fit to enter the Kingdom when it comes.

Again in Revelation 3:21, Jesus promises royal positions in his coming Kingdom. One might expect that these texts would be common knowledge among churchgoers, but they are not. Recent studies in America have shown how sadly lacking in biblical knowledge the average pew-sitter can be. The text in Hosea is again their warning: “My people are destroyed for lack of knowledge” (Hos. 4:6). How many have as their favorite verse John’s final statement that “Jesus came to give us an **understanding** that we might come to know God” (1 John 5:20)? Faith and understanding must go together. Otherwise we run the risk of being taken in by an unstudied acceptance of tradition which bears little resemblance to the teaching of Jesus.

Have we forgotten Isaiah 53:11: “By his **knowledge** my righteous servant will cause many to be righteous” — not just by dying and rising! Those who have insight will cause many to be right rather than wrong! (Dan. 12:3).

If, as someone recently stated, evangelicals do not really know what the Gospel is, then how can they be sure that they are not deceived? If the New Testament says anything, it surely tells us on page after page that we

must accept the Gospel in order to gain salvation. We must make our choice. It is a pleasant illusion to imagine that God by a sort of “legal fiction” pronounces us righteous simply because Jesus did not sin! Yes, of course, we can do nothing to atone for our own sins. Salvation cannot be earned, and yet there are conditions. “Salvation is given to those **who obey Jesus**” (Heb. 5:9 again) and not therefore to those who disobey him. Cheap grace so-called is not grace at all. Grace must lead to a conscientious obedience. And obedience begins with Mark 1:14-15.

Jesus said it over and over again: “It is not the person who says ‘Lord, Lord’ to me but he who performs the will of my Father who will enter the kingdom,” i.e. be saved (Matt. 7:21). Then come these fearsome warnings from our master Rabbi: “Many will say in that future day, ‘Lord, Lord, did we not preach as your representatives; did we not perform miracles in your name and do works of power in your name?’” And then will come this appalling reply: “Depart from me, you workers of evil [not the will of God!]. I never recognized you” (Matt. 7:22-23). One can sense the passion in the voice of Jesus at this point. There is a way to *imagine* that one is saved when one is not.

The search for and grasp of truth, indeed “the love of the truth,” Paul insists, is the only way to gain salvation and avoid perishing. Read it there in 2 Thessalonians 2:10. And then contemplate at length the astonishing words of Jesus in Luke 8:12. This verse is a high-tension verse packed with vocabulary of the most impressive sort. The condition for becoming a Christian is an intelligent reception of “the word about the kingdom of God” (Matt. 13:19). The Devil, who is certainly not to be defined as “human nature” but a supernatural evil angelic personage, comes and tries to snatch away that **word of the kingdom** which has been sown as precious seed in the minds of the audience — and then this: “so that they will not believe it and be **saved**.” Look then at the parallel in Mark 4:11-12: Jesus stated there and everywhere else that the **intelligent reception of his Gospel of the Kingdom is the condition of repentance and forgiveness**. We cannot repent on our own terms. God and Jesus are the ones who call the shots. We do not make up our own system of salvation. We must listen carefully to the words of the master Rabbi Jesus himself. We must “receive the Kingdom of God as a little child” or we won’t enter it, Jesus said in Luke 18:17.

What we propose in this article is simply an unpacking of Jesus’ own remarkable purpose statement in Luke 4:43. Jesus bore his heart to the disciples and to us. What was it that motivated his whole ministry? The answer is crystal clear. It was the preaching of the Gospel about the Kingdom of God which drove him. He was under a divine compulsion to carry out that **preaching of**

the Gospel of the Kingdom. Christians who claim to have the mind of Christ (1 Cor. 2:16) must certainly, to prove their point, sound like Jesus. Their motives and ambitions would have to be his. The Gospel has not changed. However cherished our church traditions, they must yield to the spoken words of Jesus. As the body of Christ we surely must sound and look like Jesus in our words and life. The tendency in churches is to **reduce Christianity** to a set of ethical principles (the “be a jolly good chap syndrome”), but this will not do. Christianity is not an elevated humanism; it is obedience to the words of Jesus himself and his Apostles whose writings are preserved for us in Holy Scripture, the OT in Hebrew and the NT in Greek (but of course the NT rightly often quotes the LXX Greek as well as the Hebrew).

Revival does not mean a periodical emotional surge. It needs a constant preoccupation with and meditation upon the words of Jesus, filling our hearts with his nourishing instructions as well as of course the rest of the holy writings (Scripture). At present many churchgoers unwittingly take on board the problematic legacy of the Reformation. It was Luther who valued the gospel of John highly above Matthew, Mark and Luke. Is that really true? What about C.S. Lewis who stated that “the Gospel is not in the gospels”? True or false? Think hard about that!

Or do these amazing statements avoid the real issue: that of beginning at the beginning, reading the same material presented in three differing forms (Matthew, Mark and Luke) and then capping it all off with the supplementary and equally important material in John. The danger is to begin with isolated sound bytes from Paul’s letters. Some make Paul a rival of Jesus. They don’t mean to do that, but they do it. They think that Paul preached another gospel from the one announced by Jesus! If Paul had done that, he would have put himself under his own curse for preaching a false gospel (Gal. 1:8-9). That is unthinkable. Listen to sermons and see if you are getting fed only or overwhelmingly from Paul. Is the voice of Jesus, the historical Jesus, resonating clearly in church?

The antidote to any misunderstandings is a careful examination of the Kingdom of God texts in Acts (8 of them) and of course in the gospels as well. A healthy congregation will sound like Jesus as well as act like Jesus. It is all too common for people to dismiss the teachings of Jesus as “doctrine,” or **even more disastrously as teachings only for Jews and not for the rest of us!** That theory which lurks in the minds of many needs to be exposed for the dangers it presents to us. It is “not okay” for us to disregard the teachings of Jesus and use Paul (twisted) to justify our false concept. It is Paul who, as passionately as Jesus, preached the Gospel of the Kingdom of God, defining it as the Gospel of the grace of

God (Acts 20:24-25). It is Paul who labored from dawn till dusk — this matter of preaching the Gospel of the Kingdom cannot be achieved in a 15-minute sermon. To explain and expound the Gospel of the Kingdom took Paul hours and hours. It is a task which demands intense attention both from preacher and listener.

Congregations should be urged to be intensively engaged in what they hear from the Bible — not soothed or made drowsy or “mellow.” Jesus came to give us an **understanding** so that we come to know God (I John 5:20).

As a human race we know all about giving our maximum effort to various pursuits. We admire the totally dedicated and talented exponents of a multitude of activities. How much more must we be given to the search for and finding of saving truth? Paul is a signal example of what makes for good Christian understanding: “The people are perishing,” he said, “because they would not accept the love of the truth in order **to be saved**” (2 Thess. 2:10). Remember the amazing Luke 8:12!

Truth is to be held and taught at all costs, boldly. The danger is that we cave in to the pressures and agendas which surround us. The prophets of Israel found it costly to stand for truth in a hostile environment. The demands of Jesus are comprehensive and all-consuming. Apparently he does not put up with a half-hearted approach to the faith. He invites us to be part of his theocratic government in training. When we write articles like this, of course, we are preaching to ourselves as well, in the hope that some fall-out will occur in the minds and lives of the readers, and that they would take appropriate action should correction be needed. Each of us stands before the judgment seat when Jesus comes back, and it might be well that his brilliant words in John 12:48 remain with us day by day as the journey of faith and the process of salvation continues. We are “being saved” and “salvation is now nearer to us than when we first believed” (Rom. 13:11). “Once saved, always saved” is a pleasant illusion. See Luke 8:13, Rom. 11:22; Hebrews chapters 6 and 10.

Jesus raised his voice and cried out: “**He who does not listen to my words will be judged by the very words I have spoken**” (John 12:48). That is the standard, and by the grace and mercy of God we can achieve it, aided by **the spirit and mind of Jesus** himself which has been promised to us.

The Gospel in our contemporary terms might sound like this: His divine majesty, King Jesus, father of the coming new world order on earth and prince of peace (Isa. 9), desires to hear from anyone willing to assist him in the world government to be established at his forthcoming return to the earth. Applicants for royal positions will undergo immediate rigorous training in preparation for an executive administrative office under

the King of Kings. The One God of Israel, the God and Father of Jesus, is delighted to give them the Kingdom once they have qualified (Luke 12:32). They will rule over the nations, as Jesus promised, and at that time the Devil will be bound so that he will no longer be able to deceive the nations (Rev. 12:9; Rev. 20:3). These verses will prove to the unprejudiced that the millennium is not happening now!

Candidates for royal office will be required to give up any of their existing attachments which might interfere with the single-minded concentration required of them in preparation for their positions in the coming Kingdom of God on earth. The highest ethical ideals and standards will be required in each prospective ruler. Reference should be made to the Sermon on the Mount and Paul's list of disqualifying lifestyles. The new government will not include those who persist in unbiblical patterns of conduct (1 Cor. 6:9; Gal. 5:21).

King Messiah Jesus graciously died on the cross as a sacrifice on our behalf to atone for our sins. When we believe the Gospel of the Kingdom, by repentance we are cleared of all our transgressions. Then we can move forward to our destiny which was lost in Adam and can be regained only in Christ.

The Sermon on the Mount lays out the entrance qualifications for participation in the new government. Before embarking on their training, candidates must be willing to repent of their former unbiblical ways, be baptized as laid out in Acts 8:12, commanded by Jesus and Peter in Acts 10:48, sacrifice all for their new career as students of Jesus the Messiah, and surrender their lives if necessary. Only those who endure to the end of their life or the return of Jesus, whichever comes first, will be granted a position in the coming Kingdom of the Age to Come.

According to Daniel 12:2, if they die before the arrival of the Kingdom in power, they will awake from the sleep of death, and attain indestructible life, i.e. immortality. Revelation 5:9-10 summarizes God's great international immortality program, His word, purpose and promise (Mark 1:1; John 1:1: "the word" is the Gospel of the Kingdom; Matt. 13:19; Luke 8:12; Acts 8:12; Acts 20:24-25; Heb. 5:9; John 3:36; Isa. **7:14**; 2 Sam. **7:14**; Heb. **7:14**).

The identity of the international, Christian community, the Israel of God (Gal. 6:16), the "spiritual circumcision" (Phil. 3:3), as distinct from presently national, natural Israel ("the Israel of the flesh," 1 Cor. 10:18), is the aristocracy in training for tomorrow's theocratic government, when Jesus will preside over the first successful world order, and the nations will forever and finally abandon international warfare, sexual perversion of all sorts, and the worship of all false Gods and false Jesuses.

Jesus instructed his students to pray, "May your great immortality program for future world peace be held in holy reverence," and "May your Kingdom on earth come at the return of Messiah to this earth," after the future great tribulation (Matt. 24:29).

Meanwhile believers are to watch for the significant sign of an evil person standing in a holy place: "When you see the Abomination of Desolation standing where he ought not to, as spoken of by Daniel the prophet (let the reader be sure to understand this)..." (Mark 13:14; Matt. 24:15). Prior to this "this Gospel about the Kingdom of God" is to be preached internationally, and then, and only then, will the end come (Matt. 24:14).

There are two questions which urgently need to be answered. Firstly, did Jesus preach the Gospel? Christians are all at sea on this question. Secondly, are you willing to accept Jesus' definition of God in Mark 12:29? If you do not, are you not risking disobedience to Jesus? If you say yes, then you will have to give up being a Trinitarian. Jesus was not a Trinitarian.

And yes, Jesus did preach the saving Gospel (Heb. 2:3). So now define the Gospel using Jesus' own words. You may be surprised!✧

To learn more log on to:

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Comments

"I wanted to write to you to say that I enjoyed very much the article on apostasy in the January issue. It was well researched and in my humble opinion treated the subject quite accurately." — *France*

"Your book entitled *The Amazing Aims and Claims of Jesus* has really helped us in a highest degree, and it has enlightened us to understand better the basis of the one God of the Bible, plus your wonderful number one magazine I do receive monthly from you called *Focus on the Kingdom* from Restoration Fellowship." — *Kenya*

"About two years ago we found your website and have enjoyed your teachings which have been a balm to our spirits. To realize that we are not 'the only ones' that are at crosscurrent with the established 'church' is a comfort after many years of feeling estranged from the majority." — *email*

"The Bible has changed my life. As a born and raised Mormon in the LDS Church, I was taught many things to be true, that through the grace of God I have come to understand are not. Your understanding of Scripture has been very helpful to me as I try to understand God as revealed in the Bible; which is very tough to do with all the different views of Christianity." — *Utah*

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