

Focus on the Kingdom

Volume 4 No. 5

Anthony Buzzard, editor

February, 2002

Jesus, the Word of the Kingdom and the Royal Road to Immortality

Amongst many most encouraging letters from radio listeners I received this from a Roman Catholic professor and author:

“I think it is relevant for me to say that I am a professor of theology and of New Testament at a Roman Catholic institution...and that I think that your publication *Focus on the Kingdom* is theologically important, however much it may be neglected by the sector that I thus represent. You address radically important issues in Christian theology which are entirely appropriate because in fact the theological exercise is only adolescent and in need of further guidance. I think you are doing a good work that I hope will eventually have an impact on my own church tradition. There is much work to be done before we can, collectively, think clearly and I am glad that your magazine’s honesty about these things is so unflinching.”

Words like this can embolden us all to communicate by all available means what we are finding in Scripture. They strengthen my conviction that the central truths of the Abrahamic Faith (the land/seed promise made to Abraham as the basis of the Covenant confirmed in Jesus’ Kingdom Gospel teaching and in his death and resurrection) do in fact reflect the “faith once delivered to the saints” which the brother of Jesus urges us, at all costs, to recapture (Jude 3). From email, internet and radio contact, as well as from the exciting new students who arrive at Atlanta Bible College, I am collecting more and more “case histories” of men and women who are excited and radically changed by learning for the first time in their lives that the Gospel in the New Testament is **centered on the Kingdom of God**; indeed that Jesus was the prototype preacher and herald of the Gospel, and that he never dreamed that he *was* God.

His understanding of himself was that he was **the Christ, the Son of God**. The “Gospel of Jesus Christ” means the Gospel as it came from the lips of Jesus (i.e., a subjective genitive: Jesus is the author of the Gospel), not just a Gospel about how Jesus died and

rose. Mark opened with “the Gospel of Jesus Christ” and he then began to describe the preaching of John and the preaching of Jesus. This is the non-negotiable foundation of the Gospel. John and Jesus were united in their concept of the Gospel as the Gospel **of the Kingdom** (Matt. 3:2; 4:17, 23).

If these premises are sound, the whole of church history is fundamentally changed. What is known as “orthodoxy” is in fact not that at all, but simply one of various belief options which competed with others in the early centuries AD and won out, setting the pace and the pattern for centuries to come. The dominant party won out, not because it was true to the Scriptures, but because it managed to muster more clout, especially as aided by the Roman state. There are numerous scholars who know that the faith fell away from New Testament standards of truth, starting in the second century, and that things have never been the same since. Dissenters like ourselves, and many who went before us, have challenged the status quo and we must, if we are going to be any use to the Messiah and the world, continue to do this. “He who is ashamed of me and my words, I will be ashamed of him when I come back” (Mark 8:38). So said Jesus, and he also observed that salt that has lost its savor is of no value.

For some two thousand years the notion has prevailed in Christendom that the NT’s central, saving figure is really a preexisting, pre-historical, pre-human, pre-earthly Person, the second member of an eternal Triune Godhead. It is admitted on all hands that this concept of God as three is nowhere stated directly in the Bible. *The Oxford Companion to the Bible* says, with a rather annoying British understatement, that the Trinity “cannot be easily detected within the confines of the canon.” But the prevailing opinion continues to maintain that an eternal “God the Son” is nevertheless clearly in Scripture by implication and is by all means to be embraced with conviction. Failure to do so, many say, will result in being burned for ever and ever.

Now this is a challenging theological world to live in! Michael Servetus paid with his life-blood for daring to question this amazing Trinitarian proposition. Calvin, the reformer, who also read the Sermon on the Mount, authorized Servetus’ judicial

murder in 1553. But then John Calvin was fiercely unsympathetic to those of us “pestilent Anabaptists” (as he called them) who believed that the dead are actually dead until the resurrection. Calvin also accused the trained disciples and Apostles of Messiah of completely misunderstanding what the Kingdom of God is. Calvin, you will remember, in his commentary on Acts 1:6, “Is this the time to restore the Kingdom to Israel?” declared that in asking this question the Messiah’s students committed “more errors than there are words in that question” — some 11 errors!

I propose that we dissenters marshal our case against the Trinitarian cause, which features in Christian book after Christian book, in tract after tract, and systematic theology text after systematic theology text. We are up against a huge industry and propaganda, and, I think, a colossal ecclesiastical muddle, defended by astonishing verbal complexities. Our task is to witness on behalf of “the only one who is truly God” (John 17:3). Jesus identified that God as his Father. I propose that we urge Bible readers to go back to the beginning as Jesus did, to explain who he is. “*Beginning* at Moses and all the prophets Jesus expounded to them in all the Scriptures all the things concerning himself” (Luke 24:27).

I would like to have attended that seminar.

It is impossible to imagine, if one has read Deuteronomy 18:15-18, that the Messiah was going to be *God Himself*. That text, a favorite of Peter’s and Stephen’s (Acts 3:22, 7:37), expressly states that the Messiah will not **be** God. The Savior is to be one who originates in the family of Israel, a prophet **like Moses** arising from among the Israelites. How appallingly confusing, nay, misleading, if God were then eventually to send a Messiah who was actually God Himself, existing consciously from eternity. This would be to overthrow the sacred testimony of Deuteronomy 18:15-18 and many other equally unambiguous Old Testament promises.

The Messiah, so the Jews were informed by their holy writings — and this is their belief today — was to be “the seed of Eve,” “the star arising in Israel,” the son of Abraham and the seed of David. The record of his origin dated back to early times (Micah 5:2, NASV). He was to be born in Bethlehem, and he was to be a superior Moses. In the OT’s most celebrated divine utterance (Ps. 110:1, very prominent in the NT), the Messiah was to be “my lord” (*adoni*). Adoni in all of its 195 appearances is never a reference to the Deity. God did not speak to God, but to His *human* agent. Jesus loved that psalm (Matt. 22:41-46) and used it to settle all disputes.

If, after all, the Messiah was an *uncreated* eternal being, how, on this evidence, could Israel, or anyone else, have recognized the Messiah when he came, *if* in fact he claimed to **be** God Himself? No Jew would have countenanced the notion that God was going to be the son of David or of Eve! What in post-biblical times became the “orthodox,” required view of the Son of God implies a tricky curveball thrown at Israel. It contradicts the plain expectations about who the Savior was to be, as described in the pages of their Holy Scripture.

It also contradicts the earliest pages of the New Testament. Matthew has in fact not presented us with an uncreated, eternal Son. Matthew could not possibly therefore have believed in the Trinity.

If we begin at the **beginning** of the New Testament we can make our case with success. Matthew has given us a detailed account of the **origins** of the Messiah. He is first said to be the descendant of Abraham and David (1:1), just as we would expect from the OT promises. But more than this, in Matthew 1:18 Matthew addressed the specifics of the “origin” of Jesus Christ. “Now the **genesis**¹ [origin, creation, origination, beginning] of Jesus was like this: When his mother, Mary, was betrothed to Joseph, before they came together, she found that she was pregnant through the action of the holy spirit.”

What could be clearer? Matthew speaks of the **genesis** of the Messiah, not just his birth. Admittedly birth in the Bible, and outside, means that a new person enters into life, but **genesis** points to how that life originated. Matthew 1:20: “Do not be afraid, Joseph, to take your wife home, for what **was begotten in her** (*to en autee genneethen*) is from holy spirit.” Note the slightly clouded translation in our versions, “conceived.” Mary certainly did conceive but what the text emphasizes is the activity of the *Father* begetting, generating, initiating the life of a new person. We have already had that same verb “beget” 40 times in Matthew 1 (“so and so begat so and so”). It would be a grave contradiction of this matchless narrative to import into it the idea that in fact **a previously existing** Son of God was transmuted or transformed, or indeed transformed himself, into a new person or fetus. That whole idea is more akin to reincarnation. It is reminiscent of the very pagan idea

¹ It is interesting to note the attempted corruption of the text in some MSS which replace the word “*genesis*,” origin, creation, with the less explicit term *gennesis* (with two n’s), meaning birth. See *The Orthodox Corruption of Scripture*, by Bart Ehrman, Oxford University Press.

that “the gods have come down to us in the likeness of men” (Acts 14:11) or of Nicodemus’ naïve question about entering from outside into the womb of one’s mother. What Matthew has described is the beginning, the origin, the creation, indeed, of a new personality in the womb of his mother. The miracle is local and historical. And that person is the Son of God. At that moment of history the Son of God comes into being. There is no suggestion that he is exchanging one form of existence for another.

Gnostics are not keen on history and fact, and so the story was changed in the second century by gnostically-minded Christians. Gnostics were the ones who sought to make Jesus less of a Jewish figure and more of a universal member of the Pantheon. This is the age-old ecumenical tendency: Let’s make Jesus a universal religious figure! Would he not then be more attractive to a greater diversity of people? What good would a *Jewish* Messianic Jesus be? (So the argument went.) The Gnostic twist showed good promotion techniques, maybe, but it was fundamentally false to the true, original Messiah. It promoted the ever-present danger of “another Jesus.”

So, then, a “larger-than-life” fictional, legendary dimension was *added* to the portrait of Jesus, superimposed on the biblical text, to the effect that the Son had not in fact been given existence in his mother’s womb but had engineered his own “conception” in Mary. A false halo was added to Jesus. He suffered the fate of other religious leaders like the Buddha. He was divinized. He was really not a human being after all but a visitor from another world. The remark of a Roman Catholic priest on TV was entirely explicable on the basis of the new, revised story: “God came to Mary one day and said ‘Mary, will you please be my mother?’”

With this amazing alteration in the identity of Jesus, “the historical Jesus completely disappeared” (Martin Werner, *The Formation of Dogma*, p. 298). The same author, who was professor of Systematic Theology at Bern, Switzerland, observed that early Catholicism was really a new Hellenistic mystery religion with “Jesus” at its center.

Luke’s account of the **beginning** of the Son of God is equally clear. Neither he nor Matthew could possibly have been Trinitarians or even Binitarians, and would have been automatically disqualified from pastorship in the main denominations today. Thus Luke in his brilliant and succinct account of the visitation of Mary by Gabriel: “Holy spirit will come over you [Mary], and the power of the Most High will overshadow you, and for that reason precisely the one

being begotten will be called Son of God.” “For that reason...” There is a clear causal connection between **the Sonship** of Jesus and his miraculous begetting. Jesus is the Son of God, not because of any prior existence in eternity (Trinitarianism) or from just before the Creation of the world (Arianism), but because he is the new creation in Mary and in history, under the direct influence of the Father through holy spirit. This, surely, is the **coming into being** of the last Adam. This is God’s ultimate Son, who arises as a blood descendant of David, as the prophecies demand for the Messiah. When the Solomon line was cursed in Jehoiakin (Jer. 22:28: “Is this man Coniah [Jehoiakin] a despised broken idol? Why are they cast out, he and his seed, into a land which they do not know? Oh earth, earth, earth, hear the word of God... Write this man down as childless, for none of his seed will prosper sitting on the throne of David and ruling any more in Judah”), Jehoiakin’s natural descendants were disqualified from sitting on the royal throne of Israel. Another Davidide was apparently “borrowed” from the line from David through Nathan (Luke 3:27-31), and thus the blood line from David to Jesus was established. Jesus was related to David through his mother and legally so through his father.² His real Father of course was God, who undertook the New Creation of the Last Adam, and he worked within an Israelite maiden. Paul confirms that this is the proper order of events when he says that the “first Adam was of the earth, earthy; the second Adam is to be the Lord from heaven.” But “the spiritual man was not first” (see I Cor. 15:45-47).

As early as the beginning of the second century, this story was being turned on its head: 2 Clement: “Christ, the one who saves us, being **first spirit** became flesh.” “That,” observes Harnack, “is the fundamental theological and philosophical creed on which the whole Trinitarian and Christological speculations [note the word!] of the Church of the succeeding centuries are built, and it is thus the root of the orthodox system of dogmatics” (*History of Dogma*, Vol. 1, p. 328).

What we are proposing about Matthew’s and Luke’s understanding of who Jesus is has been powerfully affirmed by the celebrated Roman Catholic scholar, the late Raymond Brown, in his detailed work on the *Birth of the Messiah* (Doubleday, 1979).

² Joseph may also have been related to David through the Nathan line.

Raymond Brown and Preexistence

He shows conclusively that neither Matthew nor Luke believed that the Son of God had existed literally before his birth. Thus these writers could not have been “orthodox” in the modern sense. For them the creation/begetting/coming into existence of the Son was by miracle in Mary. They promote a Jesus alien to the Trinitarian Jesus of post-biblical Christianity.

The idea that Jesus merely changed form from spirit to flesh at his birth is foreign to the whole NT. “Incarnation” is in fact more like transmigration or reincarnation. If the Son was alive before his begetting he was not really *born* at all. Birth implies the coming into existence of a new person. Jesus, the Son of God, was not in transit between two worlds or forms of existence. His beginning was in about 2 or 3 BC.

“Matthew and Luke press [the question of Jesus’ identity] back to Jesus’ conception. In the commentary I shall stress that Matthew and Luke show no knowledge of preexistence; seemingly for them the conception was the **becoming (begetting) of God’s Son**. The harmonization whereby a preexistent Word takes on flesh...is attested only in the [later] NT period” (p. 31).

“The fact that Matthew can speak of Jesus as ‘**begotten**’ (passive of *gennan*) suggests that for him the conception through the agency of the holy spirit is the **becoming of God’s Son**. [In Matthew’s and Luke’s “conception Christology”] God’s creative action in the conception of Jesus begets Jesus as God’s Son...There is **no suggestion of an incarnation** whereby a figure who was previously with God takes on flesh. For preexistence Christology [Incarnation], the conception of Jesus is the beginning of an earthly career but **not the begetting of God’s Son**. [Later] the virginal conception was no longer seen as the begetting of God’s Son, but as the incarnation of God’s Son, and that became orthodox Christian doctrine. This thought process is probably already at work *at the beginning of the second century* in Ignatius of Antioch (Hoben, *Virgin Birth*, 20-21); Aristides, *Apology* 15:1; Justin, *Apology* 1:21 and 33; Melito of Sardis, *Discourse on Faith* 4” (pp.140, 141, 142).

“Just as one should not confuse the conception Christology found in Matthew and Luke’s infancy narratives with the preexistence Christology of John’s prologue³...[one cannot speak of] an incarnation in Matthew and Luke. *Also one should not read ‘God*

with us’ in a Nicene sense, as if it were identifying Jesus with God. For Matthew Jesus is the expression of God’s presence with His people. Matthew is not one of the NT works which begins to call Jesus ‘God.’ And of course no NT work achieves the clarity of the council of Nicea in calling him ‘true God of true God” (p. 150).

“It is the virginal conception that serves **now as the begetting of God’s Son**” (p. 181).

Luke 1:35: “‘Will be called’ — **calling brings to expression what one is**, so that it means no less than ‘*he will be*’ (cp. **Matt. 5:9: ‘will be called Sons of God’ and Luke 6:5: ‘you will be sons of the Most High’**)” (pp. 289, 290, 291).

“The combination of spirit and power is very Lukan, occurring in Luke 1:17, 4:14, Acts 1:8, 6:5, 8, 10:38). Not knowing the rules of parallelism in biblical poetry which make it clear that ‘power from the Most High’ is synonymous with ‘Holy Spirit’ some patristic and medieval theologians thought that the ref. in 1:35, b, c, were respectively to the Third and Second Persons of the Trinity, so that ‘power’ was the Second Person descending to take flesh in Mary’s womb. *As we shall see there is no evidence that Luke thought of the incarnation of a preexistent.*”

Luke 1:35: “‘Therefore’ — Of the nine times *dio kai* occurs in the NT, three are in Luke/Acts. It involves a certain causality and Lyonnet (*L’annonciation*, 61.6) points out that this has embarrassed many orthodox theologians since in preexistence [orthodox] Christology a conception by the Holy Spirit in Mary’s womb does not bring about the existence of God’s **Son**. Luke is seemingly unaware of such a Christology; conception is causally related to divine Sonship for him.

“‘Will be called Son of God’ — It is tantamount to saying ‘he will be.’ And so I cannot follow those theologians who try to avoid the causal connotation in the ‘therefore’ which begins this line, by arguing that for Luke the conception of the child does not bring the Son of God into being, but only enables us to call Him ‘Son of God’ who *already* was Son of God.”

“However, there is no evidence that Luke had a theology of incarnation or preexistence; rather for Luke (1:35) divine Sonship seems to have been brought about through the virginal conception ...Jesus was conceived and born, and that is solidarity enough with the human race” (p. 432).

“First, in orthodox Christian belief, Jesus would be God’s Son no matter how he was conceived, since his is **an eternal Sonship** not dependent upon the

³ For Socinians, even John knew nothing of a literal preexistence of *the Son*, but only of the word — AB

incarnation...In Matthew and Luke the virginal conception was connected with an articulation of the divine Sonship of Jesus” (p.529). “Both narratives develop the Christological insight that Jesus was the Son of God *from the first moment of his conception*” (p. 561).

“Later Christian orthodoxy understood Jesus to have preexisted as God’s Son in a non-corporeal manner from all eternity...that view [does not correspond to any Lukan thought]” (p. 90).

Luke and Matthew: “There is more of a connotation of **creativity**. Mary is not barren, and in her case the child does not come into existence because God cooperates with the husband’s generative action...Rather Mary is a virgin who has not known man, and therefore the child is totally God’s work — **a new creation**...I have stressed...that Luke does not think of a preexistent Son of God...Only in **second-century writings** do we find the Lukan and Johannine concepts combined into an incarnation of a preexistent deity (see Ignatius, Ephesians 7:2, Smyrnians 1:1, combined with Magnesians 8:2, also Aristides, Apology 15:1, Justin, Apology, 1 21, 33. Melito, Discourse on Faith, 4)” (p. 314).

“Luke had no difficulty in stating that Jesus grew in wisdom and God’s favor...This saying caused great difficulty for later Christian theologians raised upon a Nicene Christology of eternal preexistence, for they could not admit that an incarnate Word could grow in wisdom or grace. Renie lists their theories on how such a growth could not mean a growth of grace of union or sanctifying grace, but only the exterior manifestation of a grace already possessed. Today we would see these as problems of systematic theology rather than of exegesis” (p. 483).

I think that the backing of a distinguished NT scholar for our view of Jesus is of great value as we present Jesus to the public. We might add that Paul speaks of the Son of God who “**came into existence from a woman**” (Gal. 4:4; Rom. 1:3). Paul uses the word *ginomai* = to come into being, rather than the ordinary word “was born” (*gennaō*). In Galatians 4:23, 29 he speaks of the birth of Esau using the normal word for birth (*gennaō*). Paul appears to be stressing that the birth of Jesus, the Son of God was not only his birth but his entrance upon existence.

The Seed and the Seeds

It is well established, then, that Jesus is the seed of the woman promised as the world’s remedy soon after the catastrophic fall of man (Gen. 3:15). Galatians 3:19 makes Jesus the recipient of the

promise. Not only is he the promised redeemer, he is “the one to whom the promise was made.” Jesus in other words is the heir to the world-throne and commissioned to supervise a coming new world order with headquarters in Jerusalem (Jer. 23:5, etc.). The Bible is after all really about one thing: Who gets the land? What could be more pertinent to the present chaos in the Middle East? Christians know how the story ends. It ends with the Messiah in charge, equipped to bring the wicked to justice and promote the righteous to positions of influence (Isa. 32:1; Prov. 25:5; Dan 7:18, 22, 27). In the interim, by the way, it is important not to be misled into thinking that ethnic Israel can expect to dwell in the land peacefully, while she is in disobedience to the Messiah who has come and is coming again. Possession of the land was never unconditional. It was for unbelief that the exile under Nebuchadnezzar occurred. It was through unbelief that Israel was again expelled from the land in AD 70. And for the same unbelief she is destined to suffer the great tribulation, “the time of Jacob’s trouble” (Jer. 31). Final repentance of the remnant of ethnic Israel will enable them to survive into the times of the Kingdom. So there is indeed a future for Israel when she accepts her Messiah. Acceptance of that Messiah would be immensely easier (as also for Muslims) if the Abrahamic version of who Jesus is were presented to them. Why should Muslim or Jew accept a Jesus who is part of a Triune God?

Jesus’ story, indeed the story of the Bible as a whole, is nothing but a royal, Davidic, Messianic story. It is spiritual politics from start to finish. The Devil has really only one trick, and that is to separate Jesus from his teachings. You can preach “Jesus” endlessly but is this really Jesus if he is divorced from his own teachings/Gospel? I think if we reread the New Testament with this in mind, we find so much of the writing there dedicated to saying “you must hold on to the Word, and by Word is meant the Gospel of the Kingdom.” “Word” in the Bible is not just a synonym for the Bible. It means the saving Gospel, the heart of the Bible. The “word” is to the Scripture as the “core” is to the apple or the bull’s eye to the target. Satan is a master of getting rid of the essential information. Muddle the language and you have everything confused. While the public knows only that “the Bible is the word of God,” Jesus said “the *seed* is the word of God” (Luke 8:11).

Jesus counteracts this verbal confusion with his brilliant clarity. He had read Ezekiel’s parable of the royal cedar tree (Ezek. 17). He knows himself to be God’s ally and bearer of God’s Gospel of the

Kingdom. Thus he embarks on the work of spreading the news of the New Order coming. He is the purveyor of the formula of immortality. All life springs from a seed. Seeds bear fruit. Based on that fundamental notion about seeds presented also in Genesis 1, Jesus goes about creating **the new creation**. He sows the royal family, his own brothers and sisters, by sowing *his* seed (Luke 8:5). His name for a Christian is “a Son of the Kingdom” or a “disciple of the Kingdom” — royal sons or royal students. The Messiah, having redefined the family as “those who hear the word and do it,” conveys the secret about how this divine Kingdom life is to be acquired and propagated:

“The sower went out to sow **his** seed.” The analogy with reproduction is obvious. Jesus reproduces himself in others by transmitting the seed message of the Kingdom (Matt. 13:19), which dwells firstly in him. The seed Message has been part of his DNA, so to speak, since the moment God created the Son in Mary’s womb. The Son is marked out by the Father at his baptism at the hands of John, an important and necessary stage of the Christian career as the public sealing of our Kingdom confession. The voice of the Father provides the commentary: “This is my beloved Son. Listen to what he has to say” — not just “Watch him die and be buried and rise.” “Listen to what he preaches as Gospel. Listen to his instructions about being reborn for immortality. He who has ears to hear, let him hear.” It is rather fascinating that Luke reports: “When he said these things [the parable of the sower] he would customarily raise his voice” (Luke 8:8).

WWJD (“What would Jesus do?”) ought also to read “WWJS — What would Jesus *say*?” Jesus provided the script for all evangelism when he commanded “Preach that the Kingdom is at hand.”

How strange that the word Kingdom is absent from almost every evangelical tract that has ever been printed!

Prior to the massively important parable of the sower, Jesus has redefined the family. When his parents seek to talk to him, he diverts attention to a much greater truth. “Who are my mother and father?” Those who hear the word of God, the Gospel, and do it.

His real affinity is not with Mary and Joseph (who even thought at one stage that their son had gone out of his mind), but with those who respond to the Kingdom Message. Jesus, as George Ladd observed, “divides society into the two antithetical camps, those who hear and understand the Gospel of the Kingdom and those who do not.” These two camps represent the

two races of human beings — the degenerates and the regenerates. Unless a man begins all over again, unless he is born from above, born again, “he cannot see or enter the Kingdom of God.” “If they understood and received the Gospel of the Kingdom [Matt. 13:19] they would repent and be forgiven” (Mark 4:11, 12) That is the bottom line of all of Jesus’ theology.

It is interesting to ask audiences: If being born again is the absolute essential for salvation — rebirth under the influence of spirit — why is it that Jesus according to Matthew, Mark and Luke did not ever use that phrase about *rebirth*? Why do Matthew, Mark and Luke not mention being “born again” in so many words? The answer must be that it is impossible that Jesus did not constantly speak of rebirth. The key is that he used different metaphors and parables (comparisons) to get his point over. In the synoptics, at the heart of the New Covenant teaching of Messiah, the immortality program is described in terms of new birth from **seed**, namely the seed which is the “word of God” (Luke 8:11) = the “word of the Kingdom” (Matt. 13:19). The Gospel/Word of the Kingdom is presented by Jesus as the immortality formula, the elixir of life, the key to indestructible existence. With the seed of new life we are truly living. Without having taken in that seed, we are dead while we live. Two camps: the regenerate and the degenerate. Jesus is creating the personnel of the Kingdom by rebirth. He is breeding the new race of immortals. The carrier of this new life is the teaching of the Messiah, his Gospel of the Kingdom, the words “which are spirit and life” (John 6:63). As that seed germinates in the mind (heart) of the listener, a new existence begins. It is an explosive event, attended by massive excitement. A whole new vista opens up. The heart soars as it contemplates life forever, the Life of the Coming Age, the Life of the Kingdom.

If one scours Bible Dictionary articles on “regeneration” very occasionally one hits upon an excellent observation about what Jesus taught on this issue: “The parable of the Sower implies that the specific life of the Kingdom arises in the human heart by the sinking in of the Gospel (cp. “Let these sayings sink down into your ears”), and its producing, as it were, a new root of personality” (*Hastings Dictionary of the Bible*, “Regeneration,” p. 216).

The dictionary does not however elaborate on what that seed really is. Luke does. He says, “The seed is the Word of God.” Mark likewise says, “the seed is the word.” Matthew: “the seed is the word of the Kingdom.” No wonder Jesus accused the

establishment of taking away the key of Knowledge, the Key of the Kingdom (Luke 11:52; Matt. 23:13).

Rather astonishingly the head of Moody Bible College writes: “The Gospel of grace has nothing to do with the Kingdom of God *per se*” (from correspondence).

A very significant loss of information has occurred because the public has been taught to say “the word of God is the Bible.” Jesus said the word of God is the seed — his own Gospel. Many churchgoers speak of “the Word” or “Word of God” as just a synonym for the Bible. But it is not. The Bible generally calls itself the Scriptures. It largely reserves, in the NT, the term “word” for the Gospel as Jesus and the apostles preached it.

Once the essential creative seed of immortality is identified as the Gospel of the Kingdom, the rest of the New Testament presents itself as commentary on this central theme. Every exhortation to “abide in the word” or “let the word of Christ abide in you richly” is embedded in the idea that the Kingdom-Gospel is to govern all our thinking. John’s Gospel is largely a sermon on accepting “the word” and “words of Jesus.” Peter rejoices in the seed of rebirth as the “word of the Gospel which was preached to you” (I Pet. 1:22-25, where seed, rebirth and Gospel are the topic). James speaks of the “word of Truth” as the tool of rebirth (James 1:18). Paul also observes that Christians are those “born of the spirit,” that is, those born of the Promise (Gal. 4:28, 29). But Paul prefers the image of the new creation. Just as the light first shone in Genesis at creation so the light of the Gospel of the glory of Christ shines in our hearts (II Cor. 4:6). Paul is a dogged preacher of the Gospel of the Kingdom and sums up his whole career as the “heralding of the Kingdom” (Acts 20:25), where he *identifies* the Gospel of grace as the Gospel of the Kingdom (see also Acts 8:12, Philip, and Paul’s relentless emphasis on the Gospel of the Kingdom in Acts 19:8; 28:23, 31). John echoes his fellow apostles when he points to the indwelling seed as the key to triumphant Christianity (I John 3:9).

I believe the Abrahamic, Kingdom faith of Jesus must confront the watered down version of the Gospel now massively widespread. Dispensationalism, either in its “ultra” form or otherwise, has achieved a separation of Paul from Jesus and thus a separation of the Gospel from Jesus. Romans 10:8-17 has been mishandled to give the impression that only the death and resurrection of Jesus counted for Paul in the Gospel. If that were so, Paul would have abandoned the Gospel of Jesus. Paul would have disobeyed the

Great Commission. Paul would have put himself under his own curse for subtracting from the Gospel the essential Kingdom element so important to Jesus as the treasure of saving wisdom and understanding. But Paul did not depart one iota from the Messiah’s Gospel. He declared as his resounding conclusion in Romans 10 that “faith comes by hearing and hearing from Messiah’s word,” i.e., Messiah’s Gospel (v. 17). He observed in verse 14 that one must hear Jesus preaching in order to be saved: “How can they **believe in him whom** they have not heard [preaching]” (see NASV).

So everything goes back to Jesus, who for some 30 chapters in the Synoptics preached the Gospel *without at that stage any mention of his death and resurrection*. The royal road to immortality and rulership in the Kingdom to come — as well as peace on earth for the human race — begins and ends with Jesus who was adamant in his rejection of any notion of coequal Deity — “Why do you call me good? There is none good but the One God” (Matt. 19:17).

Our task is to announce far and wide (Luke 9:60) the Kingdom of God as Gospel, and it is the Kingdom of the One God of Israel to be administered by the human Messiah, the Son of that Living God. ✧

Comments

“Your *Our Fathers* book is quite a revelation to me. I am only half through because I seem to be underlining every other paragraph.” — *Alabama*

“I cannot express my thanks for this information and the reinforcement of the Kingdom of God being the true focus of the gospel. Your help has given us all a new look at our God and admiration for His word.” — *Arizona*

“Thank you for your booklet *What Happens When We Die?* I devoured it and now the slumber has been removed and my eyes now see God’s truth! Looking back, I can see clearly how God has sustained me through all my searches for truth. I ran the course with prosperity teaching – ‘if you only had more faith’ teaching – ‘fly-away rapture doctrine’ – and now just came out of ‘pre-existence doctrine’ by the grace of God!

“Nothing is happenstance and I know that God has a purpose for me going through all that I have gone through so that I can share with others. The wolves are out there indeed!” — *North Carolina*