

Focus on the Kingdom

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The Gospel in Shambles

Christian commentators frequently lament the deplorable divisions, by way of thousands of denominations in conflict, which now make the unity of believers in Christ a rather shallow pretense. A quotation from a leading Biblical theologian makes our point forcefully. We recommend a prolonged meditation on his statement about the danger of denominationalism: "Disunity is disobedience to the commandment of love and is the same thing as unbelief (I John 5:1-3). Church unity is not a 'desirable feature' in the life of the Church; it is the condition of the Church's existence, the test of whether the Church is the Church. *A divided Church is a contradiction of its own nature as Church*; it is witnessing to a falsehood. Its evangelism cannot be effective. Jesus prayed that 'they all may be one, even as You, Father, are in me and I in You, that they also may be in us, that the world may believe that You sent me' (John 17:21, 23)."¹

Paul, a father figure for us all and an Apostle representing Jesus, made the Lord's wishes quite clear: "I appeal to you, brothers and sisters, in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that all of you agree, that there be no divisions among you, but that you be united in the same mind and the same judgment" (I Cor. 1:10). He urged believers "to maintain the unity of the spirit in the bond of peace. For there is one body and one spirit [thousands of denominations?!], just as you were called to one hope that belongs to your call, one Lord, one faith, one baptism, one God and Father of us all..." (Eph. 4:3-6).

It is a transparently simple fact that the presence of multitudes of differing denominations is not the will of God and Jesus, and must if taken seriously point to a root problem. It is confusion unbounded to have one denomination claim that its Calvinistic doctrine of predestination marks it as true to the Bible, another that speaking in tongues is the only evidence that a person has received the holy spirit; another that the millennium will be a time when there are no human beings on earth, and Satan will be there alone, while the saints are in heaven going over the books in an investigative judgment.

¹ Alan Richardson, *An Introduction to the Theology of the New Testament*, p. 287.

It is impossible (if the one faith is to be a reality) to have millions of evangelical at odds with a billion Roman Catholics in the name of Jesus, when evangelicals themselves seem at odds with each other over the pre-tribulation rapture, the whole understanding of biblical prophecy, whether Jews are to be supported politically by Christians, and an assortment of other disputed points. Can believers not resolve the issue of what day to meet for worship on? Is one sinning if one works on Saturday or eats pork and shrimp? Is one condemned to an eternal torturous hellfire if one persists in consuming small amounts of alcohol for purposes of celebration? Or works on Saturday? Is there in the Bible in fact any word about the perpetual torment of the wicked into endless ages? How are we to convince our atheist friends that a God who will punish the rebellious interminably is the great God of compassion and love we find in Scripture?

It seems equally unfeasible to expect evangelicals to link arms with Roman Catholics, when the former are persuaded that the cult of Mary, central to the Roman Church, is a thinly veiled reappearance of ancient paganism, in the form of goddess worship. How can an evangelical not find himself hopelessly divided over the Roman Catholic conviction that Mary was taken bodily to heaven, that she was sinless and that she now intercedes with other saints for our good?

What if Mary is in fact dead? Would that not point to the fact that it is possible for millions to be deceived by their own unexamined tradition?

Until these momentous issues are resolved in terms of a real biblical orthodoxy, denominational business will continue as usual and the witness of Christians to the one faith of Jesus will appear to the outsider as evidently at odds with the whole thrust of the teaching of the New Testament. And this is to say nothing of the one billion Muslims who, though they think Jesus was the virginally begotten Messiah, believe that *Judas* and not Jesus died on the cross and find the doctrine of a Trinitarian Godhead a disastrous departure from the Hebrew monotheism of Jesus.

We want to suggest that the New Testament puts its finger on the mother-cause of this across-the-board division and disagreement amongst those of us claiming the name of Christ or seeking to understand and know the Creator. We suggest also that we ought to listen carefully to the self-critical confessions of informed evangelical commentators. They have *already* pointed

to the problem underlying fragmented Christendom. But is anyone listening?

May I present the evidence of two writings, one from a journalist reporting in *World* magazine of August 6, 2005 and another from the celebrated evangelical Fuller Seminary. From different angles both journalist and biblical theologians have pinpointed the underlying problem with churches of all sorts. What they expose is nothing short of stunning: Churches and church members do not really know *what the Gospel is*. They express rather freely their uncertainty on this basis of Christian faith.

The problem could be easily resolved by consulting the words of Jesus as reported in Matthew, Mark and Luke. Jesus is the master rabbi who speaks as the very wisdom of God. It is his teaching and Gospel preaching which ought to form the bedrock foundation of every congregation meeting in his name. But is this so? It is our task to listen carefully to him.

Not to know what the Gospel is with certainty is to admit not knowing about the core of Christianity itself. The question, which we urge every seeker after a relationship with God and Messiah Jesus to pose, ponder and settle with conviction is this: **What is the Gospel?** What, in other words, is the Christian faith?

I begin with the article from *World* (Aug. 6, 2005). It is appropriately titled “Good News, Bad News: A random survey produces mixed results on defining the gospel.” Andree Seu wrote: “With a question and a hunch I took pen and notepad and bottle of water down to the Wal-Mart straddling the Philadelphia line to conduct my first-ever survey. The question: ‘What do you think the gospel is?’ The hunch: A sizeable number of people will answer something like, ‘We should love one another.’ That, of course, is no ‘good news’ at all but very much bad news indeed: If the gospel is the Golden Rule, then all of us are damned. And if churches are leaving that impression, we are in trouble.”

And if the Gospel is just the Golden Rule, why in the world does Christianity make such a fuss over the uniqueness of Jesus as the only way to salvation (whatever that is)? Every world religion believes in the Golden Rule.

Our journalist gathered these answers about the Gospel: “The Word of God. Look at creation...” “The gospel? Just live by it.” “Oh, I don’t know. And I go to Mass every Sunday. To me it would be the sermon.” “Peace, love, loving everybody.” “All depends on your belief.” “Right now I’m reading Revelation...all about wars...(I interrupt to set him on track.) The gospel? I’m a little fuzzy on that.” “Tough

one... the Word of God.” “A way of life or a guide for a way of life. Just like the Ten Commandments.” “I have no idea, sweetheart.” “Jesus Christ saves me.” “Your religion is your business and my religion is my business.” “Gospel. About God and Jesus and all He’s done for us on how to be good people.” “Well, I’m a Christian. The bad news is I’m a sinner. The good news is Christ took care of it for me.”

Let one think that it is only at the popular level that uncertainty and vagueness over the Gospel prevail, let us now turn to the reflections of the most highly qualified professors at Fuller Seminary. They addressed our question recently. Fuller would be listed as an evangelical (i.e. “Gospel”) institution with a powerful reputation. Simply stunning is the opening remark of one of their faculty, Robert Guelich. This professor is a member of the Center for Advanced Theological Studies and author of the commentary on Mark in the celebrated *World Biblical Commentary* series. He reflected as follows:

“On one occasion during the time I studied at Fuller Theological Seminary, the students sponsored a forum on the inspiration of Scripture. I agreed to chair the panel. As we began, I noticed Charles Fuller — whose vision led to the founding of the seminary — sitting in the front row. A couple of weeks later I saw him in the seminary library...Half recognizing me, he stopped and graciously asked: ‘Aren’t you the student who chaired the forum on inspiration?’ When I acknowledged the fact, he commented wistfully, ‘I long for the day when we can have a forum at Fuller on “What is the gospel?”’ **The question jarred me then and it has continued to haunt me through the years in my academic and pastoral work.** On the one hand the more I have studied the Scriptures in the intervening years, the more the biblical witness and scholarly debates have repeatedly driven me back to the question: **‘What is the gospel?’** On the other hand, reared in a ‘Bible-believing, Bible-preaching’ minister’s home, waking during my childhood years to the ‘joyful sounds’ of the ‘Old Fashioned Revival Hour’ on Sunday mornings, and educated at such evangelical institutions as Wheaton College and Fuller Seminary, I had regularly heard the ‘gospel’ preached and taught. Yet my years in pastoral ministry repeatedly posed anew the question: **‘What is the gospel?’** I came to understand what Fuller — also the voice of the ‘Old Fashioned Revival Hour’ that proclaimed the gospel faithfully over the air waves for over 30 years — struggled with when he yearned for a forum on **‘What is the gospel?’**”

A number of remarkable admissions emerge from this statement of Professor Guelich. Though he says that the Gospel was “faithfully proclaimed” and he had believed it for years, yet the question “**What is the Gospel?**” has “haunted” him. This points, surely, to a curiously divided opinion. On the one hand he believed the Gospel from childhood. On the other he is still in pursuit of a definition of the Gospel.

But the Bible never suggests that it is permissible for Christians to be uncertain about the Gospel, and thus automatically about the Christian faith and salvation. And you cannot believe the Gospel if you do not understand it!

Professor Guelich continues with a criticism of the current “Gospel.” “All too frequently...the gospel has become simply, ‘Christ died for our sins.’ Yet even this truncated expression of the Gospel contains much more than meets the eye or ear. For example the word ‘Christ’...comes to us as a name...Instead of ‘Christ died for our sins,’ we should read ‘the Messiah died for our sins.’”

Next Guelich turns his attention to the Gospel as Jesus preached it, noting that “The gospel according to Mark...is the gospel concerning Jesus Messiah, Son of God, who proclaimed the ‘gospel from God.’ And the ‘gospel from God’ is Jesus’ announcement of the fulfillment of the time, **the coming of God’s Kingdom**...Matthew...identifies the content of Jesus’ teaching and preaching as **the gospel of the Kingdom**: ‘Jesus went about entire Galilee teaching in their synagogues and preaching **the gospel of the Kingdom** and healing every disease’...In Luke’s gospel, Jesus announces and effects ‘**the acceptable year of the Lord**,’ the dawn of the age of salvation for the poor, the prisoner, the blind and the oppressed...*Not one [of the Gospels] presents the gospel as simply Christ crucified.* Rather, each expresses the gospel in its own way as Jesus’ **announcement of the Kingdom** either directly as in Mark’s summary and Matthew’s ‘gospel of the Kingdom,’ or indirectly as in Luke’s announcement of the ‘acceptable year of the Lord.’”

Dr. Guelich goes on to discuss the contradiction which surfaces from the fact that *Jesus* called the Gospel **the Gospel about the Kingdom**, while the popular definition of the Gospel is that “Jesus died for our sins.” How is the Kingdom related to the cross?

Why does no one today speak of the Gospel as the **Gospel of the Kingdom**, when Jesus and the apostles always did? Something, at the most basic level, has gone awry. We don’t *sound* like Jesus at all when we speak of “Gospel.” What guarantee then is there that

we are listening to him and his teaching, i.e., that we are following him faithfully? Isn’t following Jesus what Christianity is all about?

Guelich: “Much of American evangelicalism has distanced itself from the debate over the question of the **gospel of the Kingdom** and the gospel of the cross. *But by limiting the expression of the gospel to a variation on the theme ‘Christ died for my sins,’ without resolving how the gospel of the cross relates to the Kingdom, evangelicalism has, de facto, come to the same conclusion as those who view Jesus’ gospel of the Kingdom and the Church’s gospel of the cross to be two different gospels and have opted for the latter.*”

We invite our readers to ponder the amazing implications of the statement above. Evangelicals, by opting for a “Jesus died for my sins” Gospel have abandoned Jesus’ **Gospel of the Kingdom**! Guelich goes further: He rightly deplores the disastrous effects of dropping the basis of the Christian Gospel in the preaching of the **Gospel of the Kingdom** by Jesus. The “solution” of opting for the “Jesus died for me” Gospel produces a situation in which the first and fundamental item on Jesus’ Gospel agenda is dropped! This causes “a substantial disjunction not only between the preaching of Jesus and the preaching of the early church, but ultimately between the Jesus of history and the Christ of faith.”

It should not escape the attention of readers that such an ugly “solution” — divorcing Jesus from his own **Gospel preaching about the Kingdom** — threatens to remove Jesus from our version of Christianity! An *apparent* continuity with Jesus is maintained by churches when they speak correctly of the death, burial and resurrection of Jesus as Gospel. But a disastrous departure from Jesus occurs when the primary and foundational element in Jesus’ Gospel is ditched, even systematically suppressed, as in evangelical dispensationalism. This system actually tells us that **the Gospel of the Kingdom** as Jesus preached it is *not* the Christian Gospel for us today! Other systems arrive at the same conclusion silently, without telling us why they do not preach the Gospel as Jesus preached it.

A confusion over the Gospel should not be permitted to persist for another Sunday in churches! At present it is not clear that most are even aware that a fundamental problem of definition exists. It is possible to get desensitized by the sheer activity and “busy-ness” of church. Questions crying out for answers are seldom even raised. How do we alert churchgoers to the muddle over the Gospel which underlies their entire constitution?

The answer is that people of all denominations should be invited to make a determination about the nature of the Christian faith. They should decide that Christianity, to be genuine, must be based firstly on the *words of Jesus Christ*. Then they should re-study the words of Jesus and ask the question: What did *Jesus* say that the Gospel is about? Mark has deliberately provided a magnificent summary statement, a purpose statement, for defining the quintessential Gospel. We have only to follow his account of the activity of the Savior, who was the pioneer and model evangelist. Jesus came into Galilee, after John the Baptist had been thrown in jail, “heralding God’s Gospel.” And what was this? “The Kingdom of God is coming. Repent and believe that Gospel” (Mark 1:14, 15). Matthew describes Jesus as a tireless itinerant preacher of **the Gospel of the Kingdom**. “He went all about the land preaching the Gospel of the Kingdom” (Matt. 4:23 and 9:35). So tightly is the **Kingdom** tied to the Gospel that Matthew remembers Jesus saying that “this [i.e., the one we Christians all know about] **Gospel of the Kingdom** will be preached in the whole world and then the end [of the present age] will come” (Matt. 24:14).

I issue a challenge. Can you find a single tract in a Christian bookstore inviting the convert to believe the **Gospel of the Kingdom**? I doubt it. Rather the public is urged to believe that “Jesus died and rose.” But this is a half-Gospel, deprived of its thrilling Kingdom content. A half-gospel blights our current churches. We cannot afford to sit passively while Greek philosophy robs us of the Messianic, saving Gospel of Jesus. “Jesus died for me” is certainly true, but it is only half the truth. Matthew planned his presentation of the Gospel in a way calculated to help us see how the Gospel is constructed. First this from Matthew 3:2: John the Baptist preached the **Gospel of the Kingdom**. Then Jesus preached the same **Gospel of the Kingdom**: “From that time, Jesus began to preach and say, ‘The Kingdom of Heaven is at hand’” (4:17) “He went all over Galilee preaching **the Gospel of the Kingdom**” (4:23).

We should observe carefully that at this stage Jesus said absolutely *not a word about his death for our sins*. Not until Matthew 16:21 do we come to the second phase of the Gospel: “From that time Jesus **began** to show the disciples that he must go to Jerusalem and suffer many things...and be killed and raised on the third day.” The “Jesus died and rose for me” element of the Gospel was thus *introduced for the first time* well into the ministry of Jesus. But this

truth is obviously not the whole Gospel. We have seen that Jesus had consistently preached the **Kingdom Gospel** everywhere before mentioning his death. Is it not obvious therefore that the Gospel is incomplete if we speak *only* of the death and resurrection of Jesus as the Gospel?

What goes missing in the popular system, accepted without careful examination by multitudes of faithful churchgoers, is the all-important foundation of the Gospel as the **Gospel of the Kingdom**. The Kingdom of God is the goal of the entire biblical revelation. All biblical themes lead to the Kingdom of God. And the Kingdom is the Kingdom we pray for when we say “Thy Kingdom come,” meaning obviously that it has not yet come! Joseph of Arimathea was *waiting for* the Kingdom after Jesus had died. He was properly informed (Mark 15:43). Abraham and Isaac and Jacob will reappear when they are resurrected into the Kingdom and celebrate the Messianic banquet with all the faithful (Matt. 8:11). The resurrection of the faithful cannot happen until Jesus returns — “those who are Christians will be resurrected at his Second Coming” (I Cor. 15:23). (When did you last hear a sermon on the resurrection of Christians?)

Jesus will celebrate with the disciples in that future Kingdom (Luke 22:16, 18, 28-30) and it is *then* that the faithful will be enthroned to positions of kingship as supervisors of the New Society of that future Kingdom (Matt. 19:28).

The *future* Kingdom/government of Jesus is the really good news for which the world is in desperate need. That future royal government on earth is the heart of the Gospel. It is belief in the world’s future under the Messianic rule which lies at the heart of Jesus’ command that we are to believe in the Gospel of the Kingdom. There is hope, but the present situation is hopeless, apart from the intervention of the Messiah to take over the reins of world government. Our own tragic attempts at political success have failed dismally. America leads the world in numbers of abortions and teen pregnancy! A “nation under God” is embroiled in unending arguments about whether we can teach youngsters in school that God created the heavens and the earth! The West is filled with churches. Yet the West exports a rotten culture to non-Christian lands and their own standards are corrupted.

I have just returned from Malawi and with all of their poverty and lack of educational facilities, there is a “primitive” respect for authority which we are losing in our cultured “West.” Some Malawians who can afford it (multitudes have no job at all and no prospect of ever having one) see progress in terms of adopting western

pop music and western dress styles! How wonderful it would be if we could export to them a true understanding of the Gospel as Jesus preached it. It does not appear that we are exporting the virtues of purity and faithfulness. How can we, when we ourselves are crippled by a shallow “Jesus loves me and died for me” version of the Gospel? Our institutions of evangelical learning are calling for forums to discuss what the Gospel is!

A recent CNN segment informs us that scientists are now able to manipulate the genes of mice and make them live for 120 years. This bizarre information immediately captures public interest. Perhaps we humans might achieve a genetically engineered “fountain of youth” and slow the aging process.

Is no one interested in immortality as advertised by Jesus in his **Gospel of the Kingdom**? Paul declared that Jesus “abolished death,” that Jesus “brought immortality to light through the Gospel” (II Tim. 1:10). Would we not expect the promotion of immortality to stimulate a clamorous quest for the secret of eternal youth? Jesus claimed that he and he alone possessed the secret of how to live forever. He raised his voice as he declared the amazing secret of indestructible life — a secret revealed in his priceless **Gospel of the Kingdom** (Luke 8:8).

Is not the romantic fiction of popular evangelism a feeble counterfeit of the real promise of life in the Kingdom of God? How do critically trained church members not protest the claim of a distinguished public evangelist that “in heaven Christians are going to polish rainbows, tend heavenly gardens and prepare heavenly dishes”?! “Heaven” is nowhere in Scripture said to be the reward of the saved.

Jesus invited his followers to search out and embrace the pearl of great price, in comparison with which all other pursuits are relatively useless. That pearl was the knowledge of the secrets of the **Kingdom of God**, the substance of his Gospel. The information about how life can be gained in perpetuity is sitting there in the New Testament, but our clever systems of theology (dispensationalism, either explicitly or implied) have taught us that Jesus did not preach the Gospel! Don’t worry about the words of Jesus, evangelicalism whispers, because the “sermon on the Mount is not church truth precisely” (John Walvoord, former president of Dallas Theological Seminary). “The Gospel is not in the gospels” writes C.S. Lewis, unaware of his gigantic opposition to Jesus who begged his audiences to abandon all other claims and believe the Gospel of the Kingdom as he

preached it (Mark 1:14, 15; Luke 4:43; 18:17). “Jesus came to do three days work — to die, to be buried and to rise,” declares Billy Graham, who later on TV lamented his own lack of theological training. “Half the Gospel is the death of Jesus and half is his resurrection,” he also said.

These statements are fundamentally confusing. The churchgoing public is lulled into a false sense of security which we think only a vigorous return to and poring over the words of Jesus can remedy. From a little boat in a lake the words of the master of immortality come to us, though they are rarely if ever preached as Gospel. “The sower went out to sow his seed.” Jesus was, so to speak, reproducing himself spiritually. Jews had learned how the Torah was to be sown in the heart (the understanding). Jesus brings the new Torah of the New Covenant, his Kingdom of God Gospel, and sowed that precious information in the hearts of the humble. All-important is our reception of the news of the Kingdom — how, after a final catastrophic storm of judgment, Jesus will take over the affairs of world government in Jerusalem. With the faithful, then resurrected and invested with indestructible life based on the seed Message of the Kingdom, the world will enter a thousand years of Edenic paradise and prosperity. Satan will be bound.

Seeds contain the energy of life. The seed Gospel of the Kingdom (Matt. 13:19; Luke 8:12) contains the germ of the fountain of youth, the elixir of life, so vainly sought by man in every quarter but the teachings of Jesus! No wonder then that Jesus “used to raise his voice” (note the continuous tense in the Greek) when explaining the secret of immortality in the parable of the sower (Luke 8:8). He begged the public “to hear and understand.” The failure to understand the mystery of the Kingdom would leave the audience without hope of living forever.

Impassioned by the desire to impart the knowledge of the secret of immortality, Jesus issued a severe warning about the danger of careless inattention to his Gospel word: “The ones along the path are those who have heard [the Gospel word]. Then the Devil comes and snatches away the word sown in his heart so that he cannot believe it and **be saved**” (Luke 8:12). The word/seed (Luke 8:11: “the seed is the word of God”) provides the divine spark of God’s creative activity through the Messiah. We reject that Kingdom Gospel at our peril. We note again that at this stage Jesus has not yet said a word about his death and resurrection, which of course later become part of the Kingdom Gospel.

Matthew is particularly keen to stress the vital element of *understanding* for the reception of the saving

Gospel. “Doing the will of God” is the distinguishing mark of the Christian and this is closely bound to “hearing and understanding the word about the Kingdom” (Matt. 13:19). In Jesus’ great parable of the sower, the “mechanics” of the Gospel are spelled out to the attentive student. Christians are defined here as those who have received the special revelation of the “mysteries of the Kingdom of Heaven/God.” These are granted only to “babes,” the open-minded, as a uniquely privileged “in-group.” These embark on a course of training in the school of the Kingdom-mystery/secret. What distinguishes the good from the bad in the parable of the sower and the seed is receptivity to the Kingdom Gospel. As a distinguished evangelical commentator notes: “It is the **lack of understanding** which marks out the first and most hopeless category of hearers (13:19), while the fruitful soil represents those who ‘hear and understand.’”² The most severely unsettling saying of Jesus earlier warns that the majority will have persistently called on Jesus as Lord, done preaching, miracles and exorcisms in his name, only to be rejected (Matt. 7:15-20). It would seem imperative that we discern the cause of this terrible disappointment. According to the parable true faith is based only on a rock-firm grasp of the Gospel of the Kingdom — the very element which seems to be missing in current evangelicalism.

Jesus’ Gospel of the Kingdom may be likened to an impending cosmic storm. In these days of hurricanes we are given ample opportunity for reflection on the constant biblical image of the return of Jesus as likened to a mixture of earthquake and hurricane. The Bible is full of warnings to prepare for the impending event. The only safe preparation is a grasp and practice of the Gospel words of Jesus, the New Covenant. Some thirty chapters of Matthew, Mark and Luke record the Gospel preaching of Jesus before he has said a word about his death and resurrection. These chapters are testimony to the plain fact that we are to believe and obey **the Gospel of the Kingdom**. That Kingdom is the major topic of the faith of Abraham and of all the prophets. The Kingdom is coming. When it comes it will mean the overthrow of all present political systems and their replacement by the government of Messiah from Jerusalem. The earth will be cleansed of evil and of evil people. A huge depopulation of the earth will occur (Isa. 24). A repentant remnant, responding to the terrible signs of judgment just preceding the

Kingdom, will survive as the nucleus of a restored population, similar to those who emerged from the ark to form the basis of a new humanity. The resurrected saints of all the ages will arise from the sleep of death via resurrection, will be granted life in perpetuity as a result of the seed of immortality now sown in them via the Gospel of the Kingdom. These will supervise a new order and a new age in company with Jesus who has invited them into his Kingdom and glory. Such in brief is the destiny placed before us on page after page of both Testaments. The Gospel speaks of future world history. It does not speak only of individual salvation, much less about a disappearance to heaven at death as a disembodied soul. In the Gospel we are given much detail about the affairs of the Middle East during that momentous time of transition from the present evil age to the age of the Kingdom. The story ends with the glorified saints “shining like the sun in its strength in the Kingdom of their Father” and unbelievers being excluded from the Kingdom banquet. It is an unspeakable drama designed to attract our undivided attention as we prepare for the great day of the Kingdom. ✧

A Drama of Crisis, Rescue and Survival

(names have been changed to preserve anonymity)

Most of you already know of the week James and I have been through but I thought I would send this e-mail to tell the story. Obviously this is not required reading, but I wanted to write this down for my own therapy. May it inspire others who may undergo a similar crisis. We left at 1:00 pm for business last Wednesday. James was rather quiet and complained of a “little bronchial irritation.” He pulled over and said he thought he would have me drive. At one point he said he felt nauseous, to which I jokingly responded, “You’re not having a heart attack on me, are you?” He said he felt fine but continued to stretch and relax his breathing. We stopped in W for him to drop some paper off, then headed back to the highway where all hell broke loose.

I was driving (thank God) when James’ head slumped down and he made a very deep and loud guttural snore. I screamed, “James, James!” to which there was no response. He turned white as chalk, twitched, went stiff and stopped breathing. The only place I could think to take him was a clinic just west of R. I was probably going around 100 mph, hyperventilating and crying, “Oh God, oh God!” I peeled off the R exit and traffic made me stop at P Drive. That was the miracle. If I had gone straight to that clinic (they weren’t even open), there is no doubt in my mind that James would have died. But at that critical second he came back to me for about 15 seconds, asked me what was wrong and I said, “You’ve had a seizure! I’m taking you to a hospital!” “No, I’m fine, but OK, you

² R.T. France, *Matthew: Evangelist & Teacher*, p. 275.

could take me to PN by the CT.” I knew where PN was but it had not entered my mind. As soon as he said that he went into his second seizure. I floored it, dodging around traffic and through stop lights, hyperventilating and crying. I came into PN I think on two wheels, ran inside and screamed twice, “Someone help my husband!” They came out, pulled his lifeless white stiff body from the car, laid him on the ground and used the defibrillator and CPR. They pulled a wheelchair out for me and faced me away so I could not see them working on James. I thought he was dead and kept asking, “Is he breathing!?” They finally said, “Yes, he is breathing.” The relief I felt then was indescribable.

They then put him in an ambulance and I rode in the passenger side as we rushed to Methodist in SL. As they wheeled him into the emergency operating room, I walked beside him telling him to relax and slow down his breathing. He did respond although he was not conscious. I had called L and she was there with me. We waited about half an hour while they determined what was wrong. I felt that every time the nurse came out to inform us what was happening, she was going to say, “I’m sorry, Mrs. S, we did everything we could.” I was hyperventilating and thinking I would be a widow.

They were trying to determine if it was head or heart. They determined it was heart and after having to use the defibrillator again they went up his groin and inserted a stint. There was no build up in the artery but a piece of plaque or something had broken off and there was a 100% blockage of the artery going into the heart. As soon as the obstruction was released (by a balloon) there was again 100% free flow. James was in ICU all night. T flew in from San Diego and B flew in from C. My kids were rocks for me. Friends and family were at our side also. My kids and I lay on the floor of the room all that night, getting up every 30 minutes or so to check on the patient. He had a breathing tube down his throat and was unconscious. They were also trying to determine how long he had gone without oxygen and how much brain damage had occurred. I didn’t know if he would be a vegetable or wake up at all. About 4:30 in the morning his nurse came to tell me that my husband was asking for me. I cannot tell you how I felt. I ran into the ICU to see him with his eyes open. (He couldn’t talk because of the breathing tube so he had motioned to his nurse that he wanted to write something down. He wrote “wife?”). He kept pointing to his breathing tube and wincing. I told him I knew it hurt but he had to go an hour breathing on his own before they would remove it. He was moved from ICU to a regular hospital room later that day.

He remembers nothing from the time we left W until he was out of the ICU. He had intelligent conversations with a number of people in the ICU but he doesn’t remember. That night (Thurs.) L brought in real plates

and a tablecloth and served us a wonderful organic vegetarian meal. James played cribbage with L and S. I slept on a roll-a-way beside James that night.

He was released Friday afternoon — two days after cardiac arrest! We stayed Friday and Saturday night with L and C (they live 5 minutes from the hospital). S returned to San Diego Sunday morning and we took a 2 1/2-mile walk around the lake. James is doing remarkably. I am having a hard time holding him back — he wants to do everything. He even planned on playing 18 holes of golf this weekend. I called his doctor and the doctor said, “Tell your husband to cancel his tee-time.” James feels great but it has been hard on him that this event happened in the first place since he has done so many things to stay in good health. This was a fluke which we do not understand. I believe stress was a huge factor. Running a family-owned company can be very stressful at times. But the good ending is that he is alive and doing so well. We thank God for these miracles: 1. He was not at work. (If he had been at work he would have died alone in his office.) 2. He wasn’t alone. (I don’t always accompany him to town.) 3. He wasn’t driving. 4. I didn’t kill us both by my frantic, fast, wild driving. 5. He came to for 15 seconds to tell me where to go at that critical crossroad. 6. The emergency team at PN acted so quickly. We returned to the “scene of the crime” yesterday (a week later) to thank the team of 8 at PN. It was an emotional event. James and I want to thank our dear friends and family for all your support and prayers. I am grateful that I am not facing the rest of my life alone. God truly was with us that day and to Him I give the glory. ✧

Edward Acton was a missionary evangelist in Tunisia. His research persuaded him that popular Christianity had been severely affected by pagan Platonism, shortly after the close of the New Testament. We invite readers to request these two CDs “Platonic Christianity” (\$5) as eye-opening information as to the nature of the much-hidden paganism in current versions of Christianity.

Comments

“I want to thank you so much for your monthly publication. It’s such a joy to find truth today in a world of greed.” — *California*

“I would like to commend you for the good work that God is using you to do. I was reared in the WCG under the late H.W. Armstrong. Your explanations to the various theological issues are more plausible than any other WCG spin-off I have come across. I’m desirous of learning from and with you.” — *Kenya*