

Focus on the Kingdom

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What Must I Do To Be Saved?

I have been traveling recently in Malawi, which is an African nation situated between Mozambique and Zambia. In Malawi, there are many fine believers in the “Abrahamic Faith,” by which I mean the belief that Jesus is the Messiah, the supernaturally begotten human Son of the One God of Israel, his Father (Luke 1:35; Matt. 1:20; I John 5:18, not KJV); and belief that Jesus is going one day to return to this earth to inaugurate a worldwide Kingdom of peace and prosperity, governed from the throne of David in Jerusalem as a renewed city — a government which will consist of all the faithful who have followed Jesus, in preparation for that coming Kingdom.

Each day a number of church leaders, armed with their Chichewa Bibles, gathered at a central location in a village area south of Blantyre for intense Bible study regarding the great questions of human destiny. We were joined by a large contingency of leaders from our Mozambique churches. The topic to be addressed was: What must we do to be saved?

An odd and problematic answer has been given to this perennial question in popular Christian literature, echoed on thousands of television and radio stations and promoted by scores of tracts to be found in local churches and religious bookstores. The message presented by this deluge of information goes something like this: To be saved you must “accept Jesus in your heart,” “invite him into your life,” since you are a sinner who is destined to be tortured in hellfire for all eternity. To avoid this awful prospect, “ask Jesus, who is God, to save you.” Pray a simple prayer and believe that Jesus died for your sins. If you do this, when death comes, you will be taken instantaneously to heaven as a disembodied soul, there to enjoy the presence of God and Jesus forever.

The offer of salvation thus presented, based almost invariably on certain selected verses in the writings of Paul from one of his books, Romans, *does not sound at all like the Gospel of salvation preached by the historical Jesus*. It appears to omit some, if not most, of the fundamental elements of Jesus’ own preaching. It reduces the message of salvation to belief that Jesus died and rose, but it says nothing at all of what Jesus requires in those who become his

followers. It says nothing of the Christian goal. It omits all reference to the Gospel as Jesus preached it.

Did Jesus in fact invite the public just “to repent and believe in his death for our sins”? The answer surely must be a clear “no”! One has only to open the Bible and examine the three parallel accounts of his ministry and Gospel preaching in Matthew, Mark and Luke to find that Jesus *initially*, while preaching the saving Gospel, said not a word about his death and resurrection. Here are the facts: For sixteen chapters Matthew gives us information about Jesus, his supernatural creation by God in the womb of his mother (Matt. 1:18, 20), his temptation in the wilderness and his tireless itinerant Gospel ministry announcing the Gospel about the Kingdom. It is only in Matthew 16:21 that Jesus *for the first time* “began to say to them that he must go to Jerusalem and suffer many things from the elders and chief priests, and be killed and be raised up on the third day.”

Jesus, says Matthew, had been conscientiously offering the saving Message about the Kingdom, the Gospel, to all who would believe him. Yet in those early stages (before Matt. 16:21) he had said nothing about belief in his death and resurrection. What are we to learn from these facts? Simply that believing in the death of Jesus and his rising from death is only *a part* of the Gospel of salvation. It is not the whole thing. It would be quite untrue to say, as one popular evangelist maintains, that *half* the Gospel is the death of Jesus and the *other half* is his resurrection. Such a claim simply suppresses the vital saving information presented by Jesus *about the Kingdom of God*. To maintain that the Gospel is complete when Jesus’ death and resurrection are presented is to chop the Gospel in half and deprive it of its first and fundamental element: the Kingdom of God.

Imagine that a man is driving his car at 150 mph in the wrong direction on the highway. Imagine then that you urge him simply to reduce his speed but you do not warn him to change direction. Have you saved him from impending death? Obviously not. Imagine that a man is driving his vehicle at breakneck speed towards a cliff. If you tell him merely to reduce his speed, what good have you done him? He will plunge to a certain death over the cliff whether he is going at 5 or 95 miles an hour. What good would it be to tell a driver who has no fuel in his tank merely to press harder on the gas pedal?

Our illustrations are meant to point out the fact that a part-Gospel, which ignores the major element of Jesus' own Gospel preaching, is perilous. It could in fact induce a false sense of security. I remember saying several times to our African pastors: What would you do if you were the Devil and wanted to deceive people into accepting "salvation," while at the same time withholding from your audience essentials of the saving Gospel? How would it be possible cunningly to hold out an offer of salvation with one hand and at the same time take it back with the other? How could such a nonsensical and dangerous contradiction be presented? Only by offering a *part of the salvation Message* of Jesus but not the whole. A part truth is far more effective as deception than a total falsehood.

It strikes us as highly problematic that popular offers of salvation usually begin by ignoring Jesus entirely! In this way "Jesus" can be convincingly offered, while Jesus is in fact kept out of sight altogether. We are all familiar with Romans 10. In that chapter Paul spoke of confessing Jesus as Lord, believing in his resurrection, and being saved. This information is of course perfectly true, but when it is removed and disconnected from Paul's immediate and wider context, and divorced from the whole saving Gospel Message of Jesus himself, it can become treacherously misleading,

Paul's letters are inspired documents containing the pure faith. But they are not written to people coming into the faith *for the first time*. They are so to speak "second-level" communications, developing and confirming the faith of the readers who had already been exposed at first hand to the Gospel. To find out more about the *initial* presentation of Paul to the public, we should consult the book of Acts where Paul's method and message is described. It is there that we find him preaching the Gospel of salvation in terms which prove that he announced exactly the same Gospel of the Kingdom as had Jesus before him.

Why are these verses in Acts not brought to the attention of the public constantly? Why are selected texts from the epistles of Paul offered as primary Gospel information when the book of Acts tells us plainly what Paul preached as the saving Gospel? In Acts 19:8 we are exposed directly to the saving information presented by the Apostle: "Paul entered the synagogue and for three months spoke out boldly." So the presentation of salvation required an extended period of teaching and preaching. And what was Paul's topic and method? He was "arguing and pleading with reference to the Kingdom of God"

(19:8). The response to Paul's preaching was typical. "Some were stubborn and would not believe," would not, that is, accept salvation by believing his Gospel about the Kingdom. Paul then wisely separated the receptive members of his audience and "argued" or reasoned with them daily in the lecture hall of Tyrannus. Luke tells us that this method ensured that "the whole of Asia [the western province of Asia Minor] heard the word" (Acts 19:10). And by "word of God" Luke meant not just the Bible in general, but specifically the saving Gospel message about the Kingdom.

One of the greatest examples of loss of vital information occurs when the public uses the term "word of God" as merely a synonym for the Bible.

This is, so to speak, to blur the difference between the core of an apple and the apple itself, or the bull's-eye and the target. The term "word of God" or "word" is used almost invariably in the New Testament to describe the vital saving Gospel Message of the Kingdom of God as preached always by Jesus and by his obedient followers and disciples, the Apostles.

"Word of God" or "word" does not merely indicate the Bible as a whole; it describes the essential saving, immortality Gospel Message as authorized first by Jesus himself. Since most Bible readers seem quite unaware of this shorthand phrase "word of God" or "word" as the saving Gospel of the Kingdom, they constantly fail to see that saving Message in the New Testament. When for example "the whole city came together to hear the word of God" they were not gathering for a *general lecture on the Bible as a whole*; they were assembled to hear the saving Gospel about the Kingdom. Luke deliberately tells us that the preaching of the Gospel of the Kingdom is called — for short — the word of God. In Luke 4:43 Jesus tells us expressly what his Christian function was, the point of his whole ministry: "I must preach the Gospel of the Kingdom of God to the others also: that is what I was sent to do" — that is what God assigned to me as my task.

Who better than Jesus to tell us what *he* thought his occupation was, day by day? Here in Luke 4:43 he unpacked his heart to us and declared the fundamental point of being a servant of God. **It is to announce the Gospel about the Kingdom of God.** Now note the next verse (remember that chapter breaks are often misleading and are not part of the original text): The people gathered around Jesus to "hear the word of God" (Luke 5:1). There it is! A vital clue to understanding the New Testament. The word or Message of God is the dynamic Message/Gospel/Word as preached by Jesus.

He is the pioneer preacher of salvation (Heb. 2:3). He is the one whose words must be heeded and understood if we want to enter the path that leads to immortality — indestructible life — in the coming Kingdom.

Take another example: In Acts (also written by Luke, but in Mozambique our fine friends were convinced with much of the public that Paul wrote Acts!), look at 8:4: “Those who were scattered went about preaching **the word.**” Hand this to your friends and ask them, “What does that mean? What were they telling the people?” Read on, verse 5: Philip went down to the city of Samaria (pagan territory) and “**proclaimed Christ** to them.” Again, what is meant by “proclaiming Christ”? Did Philip just stand on the street corner and repeat the word “Christ” over and over again?! Obviously not.

Luke has already told us what is meant by the “word of God” (Luke 5:1; 4:43). Here again in the immediate context he explains himself. In verse 12 of Acts 8 we find a full definition of what a Christian evangelist is commissioned to do: “When they believed Philip as **he preached the Gospel [or Good News, which is exactly the same as the Gospel] about the Kingdom of God and the name of Jesus Christ, they were getting baptized, men and women.**” So here we have a brilliant explanation from Luke as to the content of the Christian Gospel of salvation. “Preaching the word” = “preaching Christ” = “preaching the Gospel of the Kingdom of God and the name of Jesus.”

Without a proclamation of the **Kingdom of God** as saving Gospel there is no biblical preaching of Jesus Christ. What has happened in popular preaching is *a loss* of that essential Kingdom element. It is widely held that Jesus’ part in our salvation is limited to his death and resurrection. This is fundamentally misleading. On the contrary, Jesus came as a historical person to *preach* salvation, to preach it by means of the saving Gospel of the Kingdom. The voice from heaven at his baptism commanded, “This is my Son. Listen to him.” The voice did not say, “This is my Son. Watch him die on the cross, and that will be all you need.”

We can put the same point in another way. Hebrews 5:9 tells us that salvation is granted to those who *obey* Jesus. It does not say that salvation is given to those who just believe that Jesus died and rose. To obey Jesus is to respond affirmatively to his verbal commands. What does this mean, logically? Obviously that we listen carefully to his orders. What is his first order? Read it in Mark 1:14, 15. First a

statement and then a command to believe what Jesus announced. “The Kingdom of God is at hand. Repent [reorientate your life and thinking in a new direction] and **believe the Gospel**” about the Kingdom. That is where “accepting Jesus” begins. It does not begin in Paul’s writings. It begins with paying attention to Jesus who Hebrews says (2:3) was the preacher of salvation. “Salvation was first preached by Jesus.”

This is not really very complicated, unless one abandons the obvious fact that Jesus was the Messenger of salvation. Salvation is found in an intelligent response to his Kingdom Gospel, the message which he told us was the rationale of his whole career in obedience to his Father, the God of Israel. The death and resurrection of Jesus which occurred later are of course added to the foundation message about the Kingdom.

Various “theological schools” have invented complex theories about the Gospel to obscure the plainest evidence of the New Testament. Some have boldly declared that the Kingdom of Heaven is not the same as the Kingdom of God. Those phrases are in fact identical in meaning. Other “schools” have argued that the Kingdom Gospel of Jesus is *not* the Gospel of salvation at all, but rather a temporary message preached only to Jews, and only by Jesus. This too is self-evidently false. There is only one Gospel, and it is the Gospel which Jesus preached first to his Jewish compatriots and then sent, via the Apostles, to the whole world. “Go into the whole world and teach them to observe everything I commanded you, and I will then be with you till the end of the age,” the second coming (Matt. 28:19, 20).

Most neglected in discussions of the Gospel are the Kingdom Gospel texts in Acts (1:3; 1:6; 14:22; 19:8; 20:24, 25; 28:23, 31). These verses and all their equivalents in terms of “the word” or “the word of God” confirm that the Apostles were indeed obedient to Jesus, and that they did not fail to pass on to the whole world the very same Gospel of the Kingdom message which Jesus had brought and taught. In a final discourse Jesus said, “This Gospel *of the Kingdom* will be preached in the whole world and then the end [of the age] will come.” The Gospel of the Kingdom is God’s final announcement to the world of His intention to establish the Kingdom on earth, with headquarters at Jerusalem, the capital city of the Kingdom, when Jesus returns in power and glory to inaugurate that worldwide Messianic empire (Luke 21:31; Rev. 11:15-18).

Offering the “Gospel” While Not Really Offering It

Let us see now how misleading offers of the Gospel can be when they bypass Jesus and treat him as though

his only purpose was to die and rise. Jesus, it has been said by a noted evangelist, “came to do three days work: to die, to be buried and to rise from the dead.” This sounds catchy, perhaps, but it ignores entirely Jesus’ own account of his purpose, which was to work tirelessly for several years preaching the Gospel of salvation — the Gospel of the Kingdom (Luke 4:43, discussed earlier). The death and resurrection which followed are indeed essential to the saving Gospel, but they are not the whole Gospel.

Try clapping with one hand tied behind your back and you will sense the problematic nature of a “Gospel” deprived of its fundamental Kingdom element. The Message which Jesus commanded us to obey is the Gospel of the Kingdom, including of course the facts about his atoning death and his subsequent resurrection.

Now consider carefully the effects of quoting certain verses from Paul, out of context, as a presentation of “the Gospel.” The Bible bookstores, tracts and sermons constantly present a Kingdomless Gospel, from which Jesus has been omitted. They do it as follows. They propose that you read Romans 10:9-10, 13: “If you confess with your lips that Jesus is Lord and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved. For man believes with his heart and so is justified and he confesses with his lips and so is saved...Everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved.” There it is! Believe that God raised Jesus from the dead and confess Jesus as Lord.

What these tracts do not tell you is that confessing Jesus as Lord means obeying him. They invite you to salvation in disobedience to Jesus who commanded, “Repent and **believe the Gospel of the Kingdom**” (Mark 1:14, 15) and said, “Whoever will not receive the **Kingdom of God** as a child will not enter it” (Luke 18:17), and protested, “Why do you call me ‘lord’ and do not do what I say?” (Luke 6:46)

One has not accepted Jesus as Lord if one has not obeyed Jesus’ first command to “believe the **Gospel of the Kingdom**” (Mark 1:14, 15). There is no true believing in Jesus or believing Jesus in the absence of obedience to his saving words. It is perilously misleading to cite three verses pulled out of context from Romans 10 and claim that salvation has been offered clearly. One has only to read the surrounding comments of Paul in Romans 10 to find out that Paul insisted, as had Jesus, that we must encounter and respond intelligently to the very Gospel words of Jesus. “How are men to call upon Jesus in whom they have not believed? And how are they to believe in him

whom they have not heard [preaching]?” (Rom. 10:14, see NASB). So faith, that is, believing “comes from hearing and hearing **from the preaching/word of Christ**” (Rom. 10:17). Just exactly as Jesus had said, believing arises when we hear the word that Christ preached, the Gospel of the Kingdom. Biblical faith is rooted and grounded in the preaching of the Gospel of the Kingdom as it came from the lips of Jesus and the Apostles.

One can wax eloquent in regard to the sinfulness of man and how man has fallen short of the glory of God. All this is true. But the full Gospel of the Kingdom must be offered to the potential convert and it must take root in his heart as the essential seed of immortality. Observe now how Jesus persistently taught how the salvation process begins and continues. He did this in his amazing parable of the sower.

The Sower of the Seed of Immortality

Jesus pictured himself as the great authoritative model of Gospel preaching. He went about Galilee preaching the Gospel of the Kingdom and called upon his audiences to change their minds and believe that Kingdom Gospel (Mark 1:14, 15; Luke 4:43; Matt. 4:17, 23, etc.). Surrounded by his selected agents and fellow Gospel preachers, he taught them, and any others who listened with understanding, how the saving activity of God works in the world.

“The sower goes out to sow his seed.” That is, the preacher of the Kingdom of God goes out to spread his Gospel of the Kingdom. Seed is the perfect analogy in nature for conveying the idea of salvation and immortality. Seeds contain the essential energy of life. We are all products of seed. So are trees, flowers and animals. Seed initiates new life. We were all conceived by seed. As it was with our physical initiation into life, so it is with the spiritual initiation of rebirth — rebirth leading not to mortal life but to immortality. One cannot be born again without the Gospel seed of immortality as preached by Jesus.

Some of the seed falls by the wayside. The parallel is with those who hear the Gospel of the Kingdom and it makes little or no impact on them. They turn a deaf ear and a blind eye to it. They are insensitive to the amazing offer of immortality to which they are exposed, and they go on their way uninterested in the greatest opportunity of their lives.

Others “believe for a while” (Luke 8:13), that is, they understand the immense significance of the Kingdom Gospel they are hearing, and they fully intend to embrace it forever. But their persistence is short-lived, and other priorities of various sorts crowd out the Message and they forget it. The Gospel has no

permanent effect on their lives and no fruit is born. They do not put down deep roots. They are superficial and temporary. “They believe for a while.”

Note that they really did believe, but it did not last. In these precious words we learn that salvation cannot be guaranteed by an initial acceptance. That acceptance must be permanent and it must yield fruit with persistence. Only one of four classes of those exposed to the saving Gospel of the Kingdom as Jesus preached it has real and permanent merit. These are people who accept the Gospel of the Kingdom in “a good and honest heart” and bring forth fruit in the long term.

Did you notice that in Luke 8:8, every time he delivered this astonishing parable of the seed and sower, Jesus “used to raise his voice and cry out, ‘He who has ears to hear, let him listen’”? Why this extraordinary intensity and emphasis when Jesus gave this parable? Simply because he knew that the hearer’s destiny depended on the acceptance or non-acceptance of the Gospel to which he was being exposed. The hearer of Jesus’ Gospel of the Kingdom had everything to gain and everything to lose. All depended on what he did with what he heard. He was hearing “the words of everlasting life” (John 6:63, 68). He was standing in the presence of the great Master of God’s immortality program, and his positive response to the Message meant everything — life and destiny itself.

Should he refuse the message he would be throwing away life forever. Should he accept it and maintain his allegiance to it for the rest of his life he was ensuring his own place in the Kingdom of God as an immortal co-ruler with the Messiah. If he turned a blind eye to the Message of the Kingdom he would be in disobedience to his Maker, whose agent, Jesus, had offered him immortality. If he accepted the claims of Jesus to be the dispenser of the secret of life forever and ever, he was embarking on the most thrilling adventure imaginable, and he was headed for endless life in the Paradise of the coming Kingdom. No wonder that Jesus, sitting in a little boat a few yards from the beach, captivated at least some of his audience with his staggering offer of life forever. No wonder he raised his voice as he delivered the parable of the sower (on many occasions). Jesus knew that he had been commissioned to deliver the Message of life for eternity in the Kingdom.

In this parable, everything turns on the reception of “the word of the Kingdom” (Matt. 13:19). Without that word/Gospel of the Kingdom, authentic preaching, which sounds like Jesus, cannot occur. The

“word” (which we saw is a synonym for the Gospel of the Kingdom) contains the essential vitalizing energy of God Himself. God’s word had the power to create the universe and it has the power to spark in those who believe it the life which is going to last forever. The word, said Jesus, is the seed (Luke 8:11). The seed is the source of life, the life of God, the life of immortality. That seed Gospel must be sown in our hearts, that is to say, it must be intelligently received by our minds. “To you has been granted to understand the mystery of the Kingdom” (Matt. 13:11). “Mystery” is a term known to Jesus from the book of Daniel, to whom the great outline of God’s Kingdom purpose for the world had been revealed 600 years prior the birth of Jesus.

“The seed is the word of God” (Luke 8:11), “the word about the Kingdom” (Matt. 13:19). Now listen carefully to Jesus’ next sentence. “Whenever anyone hears the word [i.e. is exposed to the saving Gospel] the Devil comes and snatches away the word which has been sown in his mind, so that he cannot believe it and BE SAVED.”

This is one of those riveting, attention-grabbing statements of the Master teacher. Jesus reveals here how critically important it is to God’s opponent, the Devil, to keep you away from the saving seed/word. The Devil knows well that when that vital seed/word/Gospel lodges in your heart with understanding (the heart is the seat of intelligence in the Bible), you have been launched upon the journey which leads to indestructible life. The Devil wants above all to deprive you of this unspeakable blessing. He works with utmost effort to obscure the Gospel of the Kingdom. He tries every trick to keep you and the saving message at a distance. He will work in whatever way he is permitted to prevent Jesus’ **saving Gospel Message about the Kingdom** from grasping your interest and attention and penetrating your mind. Listen again and make this a favorite verse: “Whenever someone hears the Message [of the Kingdom, Matt. 13:19; Mark 1:14, 15], the Devil comes and takes away the Message sown in his heart, in order that he cannot believe it and *be saved*.”

Jesus, you see clearly, relates *salvation* directly to your reception of the Kingdom Gospel. At this stage in the ministry of Jesus he had not yet even mentioned his death and resurrection, which were later, as they happened, added to and incorporated into the saving Kingdom gospel. To propose, therefore that the Gospel is concerned only with the death and resurrection of Jesus cancels the entire Kingdom Gospel ministry of Jesus, the model preacher of the Gospel. This is a serious assault on the Bible and reduces the work of

Jesus to his death, denying his teachings and making it impossible to “confess him as Lord.” One obviously cannot truthfully confess Jesus as Lord, if one also denies his saving Gospel of the Kingdom! To do so lands a person in a hopeless contradiction and confusion. There is no possible way of “confessing Jesus as Lord” apart from obedience to his command to “repent and believe the Gospel of the Kingdom” (Mark 1:14, 15). The words of Jesus should be carefully heeded: “He who is ashamed of me and my words...of him the Son of Man will be ashamed when he comes in the glory [Kingdom] of his Father with the holy angels” (Mark 8:38). A dangerous possibility exists of offering the saving “Gospel” while in fact not really offering it all. This happens when isolated verses are torn from Paul’s writings and the vital Kingdom-Gospel-teaching of Jesus is ignored.

When Jesus taught about himself he followed a precise method. “Beginning with Moses and all the prophets he interpreted to them in all the Scriptures the things concerning himself” (Luke 24:27). It is important to begin one’s study *at the beginning*. It is the very height of mistaken method to begin to describe the Gospel from isolated verses in Romans 10! Paul assumes a basis in the Gospel preaching of Jesus. Modern Bible readers are often ill-informed about the plain fact that Jesus is the authoritative preacher of the Gospel and that his first and most fundamental command to us is to “repent and believe in the Gospel of the Kingdom” (Mark 1:14, 15).

Mark 4:11 and 12

In Mark’s parallel account of the parable of the sower heavy emphasis is placed on the essential role of the Kingdom of God in salvation. This is all the more important in our day, since thousands of “Gospel,” “salvation” offers are issued without any reference at all to Jesus’ Kingdom Message! While the phrase “Gospel of the Kingdom” is the golden thread running through the New Testament, it is a phrase largely lost from current evangelism. The Kingdom of God has been replaced by the vaguest offers of “heaven” for souls. But the Kingdom of God does not mean “heaven,” as a place removed from the earth. The Kingdom is primarily the *future* Kingdom of God to be established on earth by Jesus upon his return at the end of the age. The crowds of supporters of Jesus were on target when they expressed their delight in the “coming Kingdom of our father David. Hosanna in the highest” (Mark 11:10).

It is a tragic twisting of Scripture to appeal against the evidence of hundreds of verses to John 14 to claim that Jesus offered “heaven” to his followers.

If one has already rejected Matthew 5:5 — “Blessed are the meek for they are going to *receive the earth* as their inheritance” — one will inevitably stumble at John 14 where Jesus promised to go and prepare a position in the Father’s house. John 14:3 immediately announced his plan to “*come again* and take you to myself so that you may be where I am.” Is this not crystal clear? Jesus did not say he would take the saints to heaven. He announced his future return to the earth so that the saints could be with him where he will be — on earth! Jesus is coming *back* to the earth from which he departed (Acts 1:11) and when he returns he will remain on the earth and inherit it with the saints and “rule on earth” (Rev. 5:10). All this is transparently simple but is constantly denied by references to “heaven” as the Christian goal. The fact that Jesus is now preparing the future positions of the saints does not in any way mean that we “go to heaven” to obtain those positions. The rewards of the future are presently laid up in store with God in heaven and they will be given to the saints when Jesus returns to resurrect the saints from the sleep of death. Peter understood this clearly. He said that our future inheritance is “reserved in heaven...ready to be revealed in the last time” (I Pet. 1:4, 5). The reward will be revealed and given by the returning Jesus, and that reward is the inheritance of the promised land in which Abraham lived (Heb. 11:8, 9), the renewed earth.

Now to Jesus’ teaching in Mark 4:11, 12. Speaking to his followers Jesus said, “To you has been granted [by God] the secret of the Kingdom of God, but for those outside [unbelievers] everything is in enigmas, so that they may indeed see but not perceive and they may indeed hear but not understand. *If they did understand they would repent and be forgiven.*” Watch those verses with great care. Jesus makes an intelligent understanding of the Kingdom Gospel a *condition* for repentance and forgiveness. We suggest a repeated reading of that verse. It contains a marvelous insight. Here is the same passage from the NASV: “He was saying to them, ‘To you has been given the mystery of the Kingdom of God, but those who are outside get everything in parables [enigmas], so that while seeing they may see and not perceive and while hearing they may hear and not understand. Otherwise they might return [repent] and be forgiven.’”

It is clear from Jesus’ marvelous teaching about salvation that an intelligent, understanding grasp of the Kingdom of God is essential for repentance and forgiveness. Remember that Jesus at this stage in his ministry has said nothing of his death and resurrection. So he is not here discussing belief in his atoning death and resurrection (added to the Gospel later). He is

speaking strictly about the mystery of the Kingdom, the Kingdom plan to bring immortality to light, and peace one day to the whole world. Note the echoes of Daniel 2:28: “There is a God in heaven who reveals mysteries, and He has **made known** to King Nebuchadnezzar what will take place in the latter days.” The Kingdom Gospel mystery is all about God’s intentions for the future of the world and how we can believe in that Divine Kingdom plan and become part of it, with the hope of inheriting the Kingdom with Jesus when he returns to this earth.

The seed of immortality was defined by Jesus as the announcement of the Kingdom, a creative word which we are to receive with faith as children and by which our lives are to be shaped. All the Apostles spoke of rebirth with a view to immortality through the acceptance of that Gospel word of Jesus. James spoke of being born again to be part of the new creation by the word of Truth (the Gospel of the Kingdom) and of having the word planted in us for salvation (James 1:18, 21). Paul spoke of Christians as those who are born of the promise or born of the spirit (Gal. 4:28, 29). Rebirth occurs for Paul when the promise of the Kingdom is taken into our hearts. Paul elsewhere spoke of being saved by the “washing of rebirth and the renewing of the holy spirit” (Titus 3:5). John reported the critically important conversation of Jesus with Nicodemus about being born again (John 3), while Matthew, Mark and Luke recorded the same concept under the image of rebirth through the seed Gospel of the Kingdom. John referred to the seed of God dwelling in the believer as a safeguard against repeated sin (I John 3:9).

Peter pulled all the elements of the same theme together and wrote: “in obedience to the Truth [the Gospel] you have purified yourselves for a genuine love of the brethren...For you have been *born again*, not from corruptible *seed* but through imperishable *seed*, through the living and enduring *word of God* [the Gospel]...The word of God endures forever, and this was the word which was preached to you as Gospel” (I Pet. 1:22-25). Nothing is more essential for us as believers than to grasp the essential saving seed of the Gospel sown in our hearts — the Gospel of the Kingdom as preached by Jesus and the apostles. ✧

An Important Comment from Ken Westby

Rabbi Teller said, “Jews don’t object to calling Jesus ‘the’ or ‘a’ Messiah, what they can’t abide is calling him ‘God’ and expecting people to worship him as God.”

This plain statement goes to the heart of the barrier to Jews of accepting Jesus as the Messiah. It is a barrier erected not by Jesus, the early Church, or the New Testament. Rather, it is one inspired by Satan as part of his age-old and ongoing plan to destroy the Seed-bearing tribe of Judah from the days of Esther to the Holocaust to the present. He used Herod in an attempt to kill the Seed before he could begin his Messianic ministry. Having failed to destroy the Messiah’s work, he developed a plan to isolate Jews from their own Messiah. He did this by leading much of Christianity down a crooked path to a Hellenistic/Platonic concept of the Jewish Messiah — saying that he was actually God Himself! This divorced Jesus from his human Jewish roots to make him a preexistent God who just visited the earth for a brief spell before returning to his God slot in a three-part Godhead.

Satan’s chimera was embraced by much of Gentile, Hellenistic Christianity from the fourth century onward, but it was flatly rejected by Jews. The barrier still exists. Believers in the One True God cannot accept a chimera. Satan has perverted Christian doctrine in its most critical tenets, the identity of God and of his Christ, forcing religious Jews to turn against Christianity’s claim that Jesus is Messiah.

For most of the first century Christians continued to meet with Jews in the synagogue. There was a growing tension that ultimately forced Christians out of the synagogue, but it was not because the Christians were claiming Jesus to be God. If that were their doctrine they would not have been allowed in the door in the first place, but for a time they continued to worship Yahweh together with Jews.

Perhaps our mission to recapture the true doctrine of Jesus, the Apostles and the early Church will contribute to breaking down the barrier Satan has erected between Jews and Jesus. ✧

Please see back page for 2005 Theological Conference information (register by April 14th).

Comments

“We would like to thank you for all you do to teach the Gospel of the Kingdom. We always look forward to each copy of *Focus on the Kingdom* and appreciate the way you write in an easy to understand manner for those of us who are not Bible scholars.” — *Colorado*

“We cannot sufficiently express our appreciation and gratitude to you for your hard work and illuminating writings. We are thankful that God has provided us with your helpful books and other resources. We pray He will bless you and your ministry and guide you in your study of the Scriptures every day.” — *Texas*