

Focus on the Kingdom

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Anthony Buzzard, editor

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A Translation of John Chapter 3

(Previous chapters of John were translated in *Focus* of October, 2004 and January, 2005.)

There was a man from the Pharisees, named Nicodemus, a Jewish ruler. He came to see Jesus by night and said to him, "Rabbi, we recognize that you are a teacher commissioned by God. No one can possibly do these signs which you are performing, unless God is with him." Jesus replied to him, "I tell you on the authority of God, unless a person is born again, he is unable to see the Kingdom of God." Nicodemus replied, "How is it possible for a person to be born when he is old? Surely he cannot enter his mother's womb a second time and be born?"

Jesus answered, "On the authority of God I tell you that unless a person is born from water and spirit, he will be unable to enter the Kingdom of God. What has been born of flesh is fleshly and what has been born of spirit is spiritual. Do not be amazed that I told you you must be born again. The wind blows where it wishes and you hear its sound, but you do not know where it comes from and where it goes. So it is with anyone who has been born from the spirit." Nicodemus responded, "How can these things happen?" Jesus replied, "Are you a teacher in Israel, and you do not understand these things? On God's authority I assure you, we speak the things which we know about and witness to the things we have seen, but you do not accept our witness [Gospel]. If I have told you about things on earth and you do not believe them, how will you believe heavenly things if I tell you about them?"

"And no one has ascended to heaven [i.e. gained access to the secrets of God] except the one who has his origin in God, the one who is the Son of Man. And just as Moses lifted up the snake in the wilderness, in the same way the Son of Man must be lifted up, so that all who believe in him may gain the life of the Age to Come [the life of the Kingdom].

"God loved the world in this way, that He gave His uniquely begotten Son, so that every person who believes in him should not perish but have the life of the Age to Come. For God did not send His Son into the world for the purpose of condemning the world, but so that the world might be rescued through him. The person who believes in him is not condemned. But the one who does not believe has been condemned already, because he has not believed in the revelation [lit., the name] of God's uniquely begotten Son. This is the reason for

condemnation: the light has come into the world and human beings loved darkness rather than light, because their activities were wicked. Every person who does wicked things hates the light and will not come to the light, so that his works will not be exposed. But the one who performs truth comes to the light, so that his works may be demonstrated as performed in God."

After these things Jesus and his disciples came into Judea and he stayed there with them and was baptizing people. And John the Baptist was baptizing in Aenon near Salim, because there were many springs there and people were coming to get baptized. John the Baptist had not yet been thrown into prison.

There arose a dispute amongst the disciples of John with a Jew about purification. So they came to John and asked him, "Rabbi, the one who was with you on the other side of the Jordan, the one you bore witness to [i.e. said he was the Messiah], he is baptizing and a lot of people are joining him." John replied, "A man can receive nothing unless it is granted him from heaven. You yourselves will confirm the fact that I said, 'I am not the Christ, but I have been sent ahead of him.' The one who has the bride is the bridegroom. But the friend of the bridegroom who stands and listens to him has great joy hearing the bridegroom's voice. I am therefore full of joy. He must increase, while I must decrease.

"The one who comes from above is superior to all. The one who comes from the earth is of the earth and speaks from the earth. The one coming from heaven is above all. He bears witness to what he has seen and heard. But no one accepts his witness [Gospel]. The person who does accept his witness [Gospel] sets his seal on the fact that God is truthful. For the one whom God sent as His agent speaks the words of God, for he does not give out the spirit by measure. The Father loves the Son and has given him power over everything. The person who believes in the Son has the life of the Age to Come; the one who refuses to obey the Son will not see that life. Rather, the wrath of God remains on him." ✧

Comment "I want to thank you so much for *Focus on the Kingdom*. I am learning so much, and keeping you in prayer. Also, most important, I am praying for the Kingdom to come." — Washington

The People That Walked in Darkness Have Seen a Great Light

by **Edward Acton** (a former missionary in Morocco and teacher at Berkshire Christian College. Reprinted with permission, from *Henceforth*, spring, 1987)

Since the light of dawn shone on the darkness and confusion of my eschatological horizon, turning me from the popular Platonic “gospel of heaven” to a biblical down-to-earth foundation of the nature and destiny of man, I have sought by scores of tracts, articles and studies — during a period surpassing six years — to scatter seeds of truth, particularly on Christian ground.

The few who have come to the knowledge of the truth have along with myself been greatly concerned over the small visible effect of our sowing. What can we do as a humble, insignificant, despised minority to awaken Christendom to the tragic side-tracking root-poisoning of the Gospel message in its tender infant years? A lady of our Bible study group seems to have had a word from the Lord for this need. “Will you make a tape of your testimony to the light and truth which you have shown us?” An enthusiastic and unanimous endorsement of this suggestion set me on the preparation in written form of what is to go on tape.

To God alone be glory for whatever way He may choose to use this testimony.

Personal Quest. For some 65 years I believed, then preached (in four languages on four continents) a popular form of Christianity. I, like its other adherents, called it the “Gospel.” Unfortunately it was not “the Gospel of the Kingdom” which we are commanded to preach, but “the Gospel of Heaven.” Its message was preparation for heaven as the hope of man.

A few years ago, however, I was arrested by a question in Acts 1:11: “Why are you standing gazing up into heaven?” It raised a question, not concerning the return of Christ in like manner, but, Why are my future hopes focused on heaven? My reply: Because my parents and many loved ones are there. And of course Jesus is there! The real answer did not come immediately, but when it did come, it was plain, straightforward, and indisputable. It was mentally and theologically transforming.

The answer came as I was reading Psalm 115 and arrived at a verse that I did not recall seeing before, although I had read the Bible through several times. Verse 16 states, “the highest heavens belong to the Lord, but the earth He has given to man.” The logical response was to turn to the Bible in full reliance on the holy spirit and the promise that he would guide us into all truth (John 16:13).

Biblical Quest: Immortality. I first turned mind and heart to the issue of immortality. I think the reason for this decision was a recognition that my foundational belief of life continuing after the death of the body in heaven or hell was based on the assumption that man possessed an “immortal soul.”

My wife and I were privileged to spend our youth in a church and subsequently in a Bible school with very high spiritual standards of Bible teaching and holiness of life. Our theology book stated, “The soul is immortal; that is, it will live after the death of the body. Death is the separation of the soul from the body.” Others of Wesleyan persuasion will be familiar with this phraseology. To us the “blessed dead” were commonly referred to as “with the Lord,” “gone home,” “better off,” “walking the streets of gold,” and so forth.

On examination of the Bible I discovered that immortality is an attribute intrinsically of God “who alone possesses immortality” (I Tim. 6:16). Man is exhorted to “seek immortality” (Rom 2:7), which implies that he does not have it by nature. He will “put on immortality” at Christ’s return and the resurrection (I Cor. 15:23, 53). It is clear that the believer will not possess immortality until Christ returns.

Anthropology. Secondly in a study of anthropology the following was clearly seen: 1. Man was created solely of dust, into which God breathed “loaned” breath or the spirit of life, by which the creature of dust became a living being (Gen. 2:7). 2. The Tree of Life (eternal life or immortality) was initially accessible to him (Gen. 2:9, 16). 3. His choice of the forbidden fruit resulted in his expulsion from the garden to prevent him from taking of the Tree of Life and living forever (Gen. 3:22-24).

Pursuing the story of the Tree of Life (immortality), we read in Revelation 22:2, 15, that it will eventually be available to man again through the descending new Jerusalem — on either side of the River of Life. Also it is an expression of the reward of the overcomer.

Creation. Another area of examination convinces me of the fallacy of heavenward aspirations. It involves no more than the story of the creation of man. Genesis 1:26-28 tells us plainly that man was created to be custodian of the rest of creation. This information is repeated in the middle of the Bible in Psalm 8:4-8: “You made man to have dominion over the work of Your hands.” An eternal commission [everlasting covenant] for man in the sphere of an earthly creation seems to me to rule out the possibility, and yet more the probability, of a change of plan that would direct his steps out of the earthly sphere.

Reward. Biblical teaching concerning the reward of the believer had further reinforced my conviction that heaven is not our goal or destiny. I read of the Christian’s

reward being on earth, but not until the return of Christ: “The Son of Man is going to come in his Father’s glory with his angels, and then he will reward each person according to what he has done” (Matt. 16:27). “Behold I am coming soon. My reward is with me” (Rev. 22:12).

Since reward will include restoration of man to his original position of rule and dominion, we read in Daniel, “then the sovereignty, power and greatness of the kingdoms under the whole heaven will be handed over to the saints, the people of the Most High” (7:27). Why don’t we hear sermons on this tremendous anticipation?

Listen once again to the words of Jesus: “It will be good for that servant whom the master finds doing this [his allotted job] when he returns. I tell you the truth, he will be put in charge of all his possessions!” (Luke 12:42-44). Paul speaks of our earthly inheritance in that we are “Abraham’s seed and heirs according to the promise” (Gal. 3:29), the promise including the world (Rom. 4:13).

Related to the reward is the destiny of the wicked, the unrepentant. The terms used in this connection — death, destruction, perish, burned up, made nothing, and so on — forbid my further acceptance of immortality for the unbeliever. The force and clarity of I John 5:12 taken literally makes me ask, How could I have so long avoided the simple logic of this verse: “He who does not have the Son does not have life.” I have to admit that a dead person cannot be tormented endlessly.

Historical Quest. The examination of our traditional theology (to which according to II Cor. 13:5 we are supposed to subject ourselves) led to astonishment, deep concern, and a challenge: Find out how and when Christian theology became diametrically opposed to biblical teaching!

Anticipating some clue in church history, I was impressed by and concerned over the powerful influence of Greek philosophy on the early church. One or two references to Plato suggested that I read part of his works. Those of you familiar with Plato, particularly Phaedo, will understand my increasing amazement. The doctrinal statements concerning man, death, and immortality cited above were purely and simply quoted from Plato. Illustrations from Plato:

“The soul is most like the divine, and immortal.”

“Do we think there is such a thing as death? Is it any more than the separation of the soul from the body?”

“When a man dies, the visible part of him, the body...will dissolve and disappear. But the soul goes to another place noble and pure...in the presence of God, where, if God will, my soul will shortly be” (Phaedo).

It is sad that such phrases have been largely accepted by Christian theologians.

How and when did Christian theologians espouse the teachings of a heathen philosopher? It must have been a gradual process, involving far more names than those with which I am acquainted. But I am alarmed with the rapid progress (or should I say regress) in this direction on the part of St. Augustine. This revered leader of Christendom in the fourth and fifth centuries played a vital part in the divorce of theology from Scripture and an unholy alliance with Platonic philosophy.

“His mind was the crucible in which the religion of the New Testament was most completely fused with the Platonic tradition of Greek philosophy. And it was also the means by which the product of this fusion was transmitted to the Christendoms of medieval Roman Catholicism and Renaissance Protestantism” (*Encyclopedia Britannica*, 1975, 2, 264).

My analogy of marriage to describe this union is changed by the historian to “fusion.” This figure is probably more applicable, especially in a day of very fragile marriages. I recall from high school science class placing two distinct metals in a crucible over the Bunsen burner until they were fused into one new metal. And how true it is that a new compound, Platonic Christianity, has been spread widely over most of Christendom. It happened in spite of Paul’s warning to the Colossians, Ephesians and Galatians: “See to it that no one takes you captive through hollow and deceptive philosophy” (Col. 2:8).

Conclusion. The surprising revelation of these truths I have sought to share with you concisely. It is my response to the injunction of Jesus: “Let your light shine” (Matt. 5:15, 16). It is accompanied also by a prayer: “Walk while we have the light, so that darkness not come upon us” (John 12:35). ✧

A New Book

I am writing a book in very basic English. When I was last in Malawi and found so much interest in Bible study I realized I needed to have available an account of the Christian Gospel and the meaning of life in easy language. I think it has been useful to document the great truths of the Bible with backing not only from the Bible but many scholars. I realize that for many the scholarly backing is not needed. They want something simple. Here is the introduction to the book and the first chapter. We will hope to publish the whole book within a few months and make it available. If you feel like commenting on the style, please do (anthonybuzzard@mindspring.com). It may be that it will be useful for you in your own evangelism of the Kingdom. Just tell people about what God has planned. It is a marvelous story.

The Aims and Claims of Jesus: What You Didn't Learn in Church

Introduction

The first nine (short) chapters of this book are designed to give readers who have no special training in the Bible a clear idea of God's grand program. God desires to grant immortality to believers in Jesus, the Messiah, in the coming Kingdom. I believe that the Kingdom of God is the answer to the great puzzle of life. It was the core of everything Jesus taught. All of the Bible is concentrated on one major theme, the coming Kingdom.

The Christian Gospel is called **the Gospel about the Kingdom of God**.

The Bible contains a thrilling story, an amazing drama, and it promises a wonderful outcome for our world. At the same time it threatens those who do not pay attention to Jesus and his aims and claims with a tragic future. God expects us to listen to what He has to say to us through His Son. He gives us a choice. The Son laid before us two possible destinies, life or death. The Gospel is both a promise and a menace, a threat.

These first nine chapters refer to or quote a number of fundamentally important Bible verses. You do not need to have your own Bible to follow what I have written. If you have a Bible any version will confirm the story unfolded here. (In America the RSV or NRSV or New American Standard Bible are generally reliable and easy to read versions. I would suggest not reading the King James Version, unless that is all you have. My reason is that you do not speak English the way the King James version was translated [in 1611]. Its language puts up a kind of barrier between you and the vitally important words of Scripture.)

It is important for the reader to know that I am inventing no new teachings here. Everything I have written has appeared in scholarly literature. But the public knows little about that literature. And scholars have a poor record of actually believing what they know the Bible says.

What I am suggesting is that churches do not do a good job of relaying the Gospel as Jesus preached it. I have attempted to explain those areas in which what we learned in church departs radically from some of the plainest and most emphasized teachings of Jesus and his Apostles. I can only ask the reader to read with an open mind.

The first nine chapters are written in fairly simple English. The sentences are generally not long or complicated. Part two of the book contains seven guide

lessons on the Kingdom of God. There is a deliberate overlap in these lessons with the material in the first nine, easier chapters. The guide lessons add more confirmation from outside authorities and more detail about the Kingdom of God Gospel as preached by Jesus. They are a supplement and offer more biblical evidence about the Gospel for the inquiring reader.

Finally I have added some appendices with a list of biblical texts about death and resurrection and further confirmation from many experts of some of the main foundations of the Kingdom Gospel of Jesus as I am convinced he meant it to be understood and acted on.

Quotations of the Bible are from various translations and I have rendered the Greek and Hebrew myself occasionally. On the whole there is nothing controversial at stake here. All translations convey the central concerns of Jesus quite well.

Churches have inherited much of what they believe from post-biblical church fathers and not from the Bible. Since the Reformation in 1517 Protestants seem to follow Luther and Calvin as new "church fathers." Luther's approach to the Gospel is strangely unbiblical since he did not think that Jesus preached the Gospel. He also thought that there was nothing Christian about the book of Revelation since "Christ is not taught in it." Luther called the book of James "a straw epistle." James disagreed with Luther's understanding about how to be right with God. Luther's idea was that the Gospel is found in Romans and Galatians and I Peter, but not primarily in the gospel accounts of Jesus' preaching. He thought that Matthew, Mark and Luke were unimportant as far as the Gospel is concerned!

Calvin's God is so cruel that he predestined some human beings to be tortured in hell for ever. Calvin, who was well read in the Bible, also authorized the burning at the stake of a distinguished contemporary Bible scholar, who challenged him on an important doctrine. Killing others for any reason is utterly unlike anything advocated by Jesus. And killing another believer over a doctrine is really just murder, which the Bible forbids.

I propose that Christianity is to be built firstly on Jesus, and **Jesus without his teaching and preaching of the Gospel is not really Jesus at all**. "Jesus" can be made the subject of all sorts of pious religious ideas and hopes. But the Jewish Jesus of history, the only Jesus, now at the right hand of God, claimed to be the Jewish-Christian Messiah and to have the secret of immortality. He preached the saving Message about the Kingdom. So did the Apostles after him. Jesus is by far the most challenging and gripping figure ever to have stepped the earth. As his contemporaries observed, "no one ever taught like this."

I echo the words of distinguished scholars of the Bible. I quote just one example among many. I think that their words should sound the alarm. “Neither Catholic nor Protestant theology is based on biblical theology. In each case we have a domination of Christian theology by Greek thought...Pagan ideas have largely dominated ‘Christian’ thought...The immortality of the soul is not a biblical idea at all.”¹

I wonder sometimes if Jesus would be at all welcome in our contemporary churches. The reader will have to decide.

Chapter 1: What Did Jesus Preach About?

My sole purpose in this book is to describe in uncomplicated language what I think the Bible tells us about God — about what the Creator of the universe had in mind when He created the heavens and the earth. About God’s grand design. What is His great purpose for you and for the world? I want to explain to you what He expects of you and me, in whatever condition we find ourselves. What God’s goal is for you, as you battle your way through life’s difficulties. And I want to show you what God has in store for those who really love Him and His Son, Jesus.

Perhaps you are an important and influential financier, controlling large sums of money. Perhaps you are a teacher touching and forming the minds of the young as they gather before you daily in school. Perhaps you are thankfully working as a housekeeper in a Malawi guest-house, mopping floors and washing dishes, or serving breakfast to the constantly changing population at your workplace. In Malawi, a place quite well known to me, one is very thankful to have a job at all, and a salary, however meager. Most of the good Malawians we have been privileged to know have no job and no prospect of ever having one. Many also live on a form of maize as a staple diet. They call it nsima. Many of our friends in Malawi, as in many other countries, do not have electricity or plumbing. Yet God is interested in them, not a bit less than anyone else. God is not impressed with social standing. But He is interested in His creation. He is interested in you, whoever you are. Wherever you are.

I repeat: God is not much interested in your “station” in life, your titles or your degrees or your accomplishments. But God is interested in your immortality, in your living forever. He created you with immortality in mind. Immortality means you cannot die. To be immortal means to be indestructible. It means that once you acquire immortality (which you do not yet have)

¹Professor Norman Snaith, *The Distinctive Ideas of the Old Testament*, pp. 188, 189.

you cannot ever cease to be alive! You will have life in perpetuity. When you are immortal, you cannot be diseased. You can never be killed. You will simply be indestructible (as is claimed for some of those children’s toys!).

I want to tell you about God’s immortality plan for human beings. It is actually not a very complicated plan. If it were, one would have to have special intellectual skills and ability to understand it. You do not need any brilliance or special training to grasp God’s immortality plan. But you do need an open mind. And a truth-seeking attitude.

You need no special skills to read this book. I want to make things simple. But I want you to understand that you may not have learned much of what the Bible tells us about immortality in church. You may have learned very little about the Gospel as Jesus preached it. I will ask you to evaluate that last statement when you have completed reading these chapters.

If God had provided us with a Bible which only a learned scholar with years of training can understand, He really cannot have intended ordinary people to understand Scripture, the Bible. But the records we have of Jesus when he was on earth show that he preached to the uneducated as well as the educated. He wanted his Immortality-Message, what he called the Gospel, to be accessible to everyone. All they had to do was to pay careful attention, give themselves wholeheartedly to what Jesus said, then pursue the goal for their lives which Jesus laid before them. And they were to pursue that goal relentlessly for the rest of their lives. They were never to give up, whatever opposition or trial might come their way. “He who endures to the end will be saved,” Jesus said.

What goal did Jesus present to his audiences? Quite simple. Just open your Bible² to Luke, chapter 4 and verse 43 and you will find Jesus telling us there what he was “all about.” You will find him in that verse giving his mission statement, the purpose for all his preaching and teaching, the reason for his whole activity in the service of God, his Father. You will find here Jesus’ master-word, the genius of all he stood for.

(Jesus as you know claimed to be the Son of God. If you had asked him about who his father was, he would have looked you in the eye and said “God is my father.” I trust that would have got your attention, your rapt

²If you do not happen to have a Bible, please read on. At some point you will probably at least have access to a Bible, and I am going to tell the story of the Bible and often quote large sections of it in this book. I will provide lots of quotations as we unfold God’s Kingdom story.

attention. How many people do you know who can say “God is my father,” meaning that they have no human father? Yes, Jesus had no *human* father. He was a special creation like Adam. The difference between Adam and Jesus is that Jesus was created or “begotten” in the womb of Mary his mother. Adam was made from the dust of the ground. Both Adam and Jesus are called son of God.)

More about who Jesus is and was in a later chapter. For the moment I want to be sure that you have grasped the stunning information given by Jesus in that verse in Luke 4:43 I just referred to. Luke 4:43. Write it down. Memorize it. It is a marvelous unpacking of the mind of Jesus. It tells you about his career, what his aims were, or rather what his single aim was. To know what *Jesus* thought the purpose of life was is indeed a great privilege and treasure. You can share his aims.

What drove the whole career and mission of Jesus? Let him answer in Luke 4:43: “I came to preach the Gospel (Good News) of the Kingdom of God. That is what I was commissioned to do.” Yes, that is what Jesus was sent by God to do. To announce the Gospel of the Kingdom of God. Since that was Jesus’ mission statement, that is the heart of the Christian faith. This is where your study of Jesus and his message must begin. Not to grasp what Jesus said here is to miss out on the whole point of his activity for some three years in Israel 2000 years ago. So please look again at Luke 4:43. Read it in any translation. The sense will be very clear. **Jesus was an impassioned preacher of what he called the Gospel (Good News) about the Kingdom of God.** God sent him, commissioned him, authorized him to do just that — preach the Gospel of the Kingdom.

The Gospel is about the Kingdom of God. That is fact number one about Christianity. I have to repeat this: “The Gospel of the Kingdom” is the summary statement of the Christian faith. Jesus said it was, and if you are going to follow Jesus, it is wise to adopt his Gospel of the Kingdom as the center of your interest from now on. It was Jesus’ “magnificent obsession” as someone has said, and if you want to think like Jesus and be like Jesus, the only sensible policy is to adopt his mission statement as yours. The Kingdom of God is Jesus’ rallying cry and slogan.

I don’t mean of course that you rush out today to preach the Kingdom of God because we need to find out first what he meant by Gospel or Good News and what he meant by Kingdom of God. But it is futile to proceed further in your search for the meaning of the universe, for the purpose of God in your life, for the heart of Christianity, until you have thoroughly taken in the basic fact that Jesus’ purpose — and he was the spokesman for

God, his Father — was to announce the Gospel about the Kingdom.

I invite you, if possible with open Bible, to notice the verses which immediately follow Jesus’ great and classic statement about the whole point of his mission and about Christianity, in Luke 4:43. You will find in Luke 5:1 that people listening to the Gospel of the Kingdom were listening to what Luke calls the “word of God.” Now that phrase “word of God” is one which you *must* understand, if you are going to make sense of the Bible and especially the New Testament books. Just as we all recognize the term “USA” as shorthand for America, so Luke establishes for us here a “shorthand” for the Gospel of the Kingdom. Since the Gospel of the Kingdom is the heart and core of everything Jesus said and did, it is natural for those “in the know” to refer to that great saving Gospel message about the Kingdom simply as “the word of God,” which means “the message.” Other New Testament writers refer to the Gospel of the Kingdom as “the word of God.” This is no more difficult than understanding the fact that we often refer to the President of the United States of America as simply “the President.” We all recognize this, but most people do not know what “the word,” as used in the New Testament, means.

I want to make this point crystal clear. Please do not confuse this important phrase “word of God.” *It is not just another way of referring to the whole Bible.* Unfortunately in churches and on radio and TV, this vital phrase “word of God” is constantly used as just another way of referring to the Bible. Why is this point so important? Because within the whole Bible, which is called the Scriptures or holy writings, we have what is called “the word,” or “the word of God.” And both those phrases mean the saving Gospel message of the Kingdom of God which both Jesus and the Apostles always preached to the public. Is that point clear to you? Let me give you just one example: In the book of Acts we very often read that the preachers preached “the word.” What does that mean? Is that just a general and vague statement about preaching anywhere from the Bible?

No. “The word” or “word of God” is the specific Gospel preaching about the Kingdom of God. “Next Sabbath they came together to hear the word of God” (Acts 13:44). “They went everywhere preaching the word” (Acts 8:4). This was not a general lecture on the Bible. It was the Gospel, as Jesus had preached it. “The word” is the core of the Bible. The Bible is certainly “the words of God,” but the heart of the Bible is called the Gospel or “word,” or “word of God” many times in the New Testament. Jesus was the first and authoritative preacher of the saving Gospel. And it is quite untrue to say that Jesus’ Gospel was meant for Jews only! It is

meant for everyone. Hebrews 2:3 is a very important verse: “**salvation was first spoken by the Lord [Jesus].**” The Gospel about the Kingdom is for everyone. It is the Christian Gospel. (The death and resurrection of Jesus are part of the Gospel but not the whole Gospel.)

We are going to see that it is this **Gospel of the Kingdom** which we all must grasp and understand and take into our lives as vital spiritual food. It is the Gospel about immortality and we suggest to you that Jesus is the first, model preacher of immortality. Here is how Paul put this rivetingly interesting and important concept: Paul wrote to Timothy, his student in the faith, and said that Jesus had brought “life and immortality to light through the Gospel” (II Tim. 1:10). There it is! Stop and ponder that wonderful statement. It was Jesus, preaching his Gospel of the Kingdom, who brought the secret of how to live forever to light. It was in Jesus’ Message, and in no other, that we are to find the amazing secret of living eventually forever.

But in church this simple fact about “the word” and the Gospel is not clear. Many in church have very vague ideas only about what the Gospel is. In church circles you almost never hear the phrase “Gospel of the Kingdom.”

Whereas Jesus and Paul spoke of “the Gospel *about the Kingdom of God*” churches do not. They do not sound like Jesus and Paul.

Now people today sometimes go to extraordinary lengths to preserve their lives for a few extra years. (Many die much too early due to smoking or other practices which take years off their lives.) Some in California hope that their dead bodies might be frozen in the hope that science will find a way of bringing them back to life! What these people do not understand is that Jesus has already told us how we can have life forever, indestructible life. He said that **the secret is bound up with his Gospel preaching Message about the Kingdom of God.** In another chapter we are going to look at, and hopefully listen very carefully to, that Gospel of the Kingdom which Jesus said was the very purpose of all his preaching and teaching. Remember that Paul added that Jesus had revealed the way to immortality in that Gospel or “word.”

Presumably you are interested in living forever. Does the idea of having eternal youth and not being able to die grab your attention? It does mine! The secret of life for ever and ever is sitting right there in the pages of the Bible, but I rather doubt that it has been clearly explained to you in church. If that sounds incredible please hear me out. Read on and see for yourself. (There are historical reasons why important Bible truths have been largely lost to huge church organizations.)

May I remind you to listen carefully and see if churches use the same language about the Gospel as Jesus did? Do they speak constantly about “the Gospel *of the Kingdom*”? Jesus always did. Paul always did. They both “welcomed the people and began talking about or preaching the Gospel of the Kingdom” (see Luke 9:6; Acts 28:30, 31).

So what have we said so far? That God, the creator of all things and the one who gives us every breath we breathe and equips us with our amazing bodies and minds, has a plan and purpose for every human being born. That purpose can be discovered in the Christian Bible, though, due to a great muddle in churches, you may not have seen or heard that Plan clearly explained. I want to remedy that situation.

In addition we have pointed you to Luke 4:43 which is the grand mission statement of Jesus himself. It reveals his whole purpose. It was to preach the Good News about the Kingdom of God and how to gain immortality in that Kingdom.

In the next chapter we begin to investigate what Jesus meant by the Gospel of the Kingdom. But before we do this, let me leave you with a question. Are you aware of having heard sermons on the Gospel of the Kingdom? If your answer is doubtful or “no,” you might wonder why this is.

Since churches are meant to be representing Jesus and his Gospel, are they in fact doing their job, if they never talk about the very subject which Jesus said was the whole point of Christianity? Give that question some serious thought. You might even inquire among your friends if they define the Gospel as Jesus did. Ask them in a non-threatening way what the Christian Gospel is. If they do not immediately respond that it is the Gospel of the Kingdom, you might follow up by asking them why their answer was different from Luke 4:43 (and hundreds of other verses we have not had time to look at). These conversations about the Gospel and immortality can be fascinating. So much more interesting than talking about football or the weather. ✧

Edward Acton (see article, page 2) was a missionary evangelist in Morocco. 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 three CDs “Platonic Christianity” (\$5) as eye-opening information as to the nature of the much-hidden paganism in current versions of Christianity. Please email us at anthonybuzzard@mindspring.com to request these.