

# Focus on the Kingdom

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Last month we presented the first chapter of a book we hope will be available in a few months. My purpose with this book is to provide an uncomplicated account of the Gospel and salvation as Jesus preached it. Your many kind comments have been encouraging. We need to be able to state in simple language, uncluttered with footnotes and references to other literature, what God offers humanity as the grand goal of this present life. It appears to us that God's "dream" of establishing the Kingdom of God on earth — the essence of the Gospel as Jesus preached it — is virtually lost from contemporary preaching of the Gospel. The story of God's great design through Messiah Jesus needs to be told in plain language. Our hope is that this forthcoming book, *The Aims and Claims of Jesus — What You Didn't Learn in Church*, will make a contribution to the progress of the Gospel in our time.

We have tried to document in our Trinity book (*The Doctrine of the Trinity: Christianity's Self-Inflicted Wound*, available at 800-347-4261) the failure of churches to embrace the simple monotheistic creed of Jesus and of Israel. Messiah Jesus has been turned into a visitor from outer space. The so-called doctrine of the Incarnation makes Jesus non-human. You cannot be pre-human and human! You cannot preexist yourself. You cannot be older than yourself, or older than your mother. A descendant of David, which the Messiah *must* be, cannot at the same time be billions of years older than David. You cannot *come into existence* as the son of David if you are *already* in existence! Luke 1:35 provides a totally satisfying and sufficient portrait of Jesus as the Son of God. That verse gives us the basis on which Jesus is the Son of God. It has nothing at all to say about the Incarnation of a second member of an eternal Triune Godhead.

From the middle of the second century the church moved away from the Messiah Jesus of the Bible and embraced an essentially non-human figure who descended to the earth from a prehistorical existence as either an antemundane *created* Son of God or later as the *eternal* Son of God.

Happily scholars around the world from different denominational camps have been sounding the alarm, as we are attempting to do, that all is not well with traditional creeds. (We recommend for the serious student of Christology *Born Before All Time? The Dispute over Christ's Origin* by Karl-Joseph Kuschel and J.A.T. Robinson's *Priority of John*. The section on "The Person

of Christ" brilliantly explains the need for returning to belief in the human Messiah. The same author's *Human Face of God* is also a valuable resource. James Dunn's *Christology in the Making* is a marvelous investigation of the whole question of the traditional idea of Incarnation. Dunn argues that Bible readers constantly read *into* the Bible, not *out of* it, their preconceived ideas about who Jesus is. In his second edition Dunn concedes that the Christ of the book of John is "not the incarnation of the Son of God" (p. xxvii). There is, in other words, no preexisting Son of God who becomes a man. Jesus is the expression of God in a human being.)

As Christians we are meant to know who Jesus is. And we are meant to be able to teach his identity to others. He is not God, but the Son of God coming into existence by miracle in the womb of Mary (Luke 1:35). How then did we get from the Bible to the confused state of affairs we now witness in denominationalism?

Unfortunately, from the second century onwards, under the influence of pagan Greek philosophy, Jesus has been given a pre-history which makes it impossible for him to be what he *must* be to fulfill the biblical model — the Messiah, son of David. On that stupendous and marvelous truth the church of Christ is to be founded and grounded (Matt. 16:16-18). Contemporary churches, however, shifted the foundation to another base: that Jesus is God. And woe betide any who is not prepared to say "Jesus is God"! The problem is that any who declare that "Jesus is God" immediately declare, since the Father is obviously God, their belief in *two* who are God! Is this not dangerous polytheism?

May I now offer you a further preview of our upcoming, uncomplicated account of salvation and the purpose of God for our lives and for history. In the October issue of *Focus on the Kingdom* (now at our website, with all the other issues since 1998) I wrote, after giving you the first chapter of *The Aims and Claims of Jesus*:

"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.”

Our hope is that you will take this material and begin to talk to your friends and other contacts about the Gospel of the Kingdom. Matthew 24:14 states very clearly that the knowledge of the Gospel as Jesus preached it must circle the globe before Jesus returns to bring peace to our tortured earth.

Now some exciting news from the evangelical world. Leading thinkers are beginning to express their deep concern about the inadequate Gospel being offered by churches. Discussing “The Gospel in a Post-Christian Culture,” at a Billy Graham Center Evangelism Round Table, Brian McClaren, senior pastor of Cedar Ridge Community Church, writes, “Our strategy needs rethinking...[We must] admit that we may not actually understand the Good News [Gospel] and seek to rediscover it, or reboot our theology in a new understanding of the Gospel of Jesus...If Christianity is not primarily information about how one gets his or her personal soul into heaven after death, then almost nobody on earth presently seems to know what it is instead[!]. A tiny number of Christian leaders...are making a daring counterproposal: perhaps the Gospel has something to do with the Kingdom of God, and perhaps the Kingdom of God is not equal to going to heaven after death, but rather involves God’s will being done on earth.”

Abrahamic Adventists, along with others, have been complaining for decades that the Gospel must be defined as Jesus and Paul defined it, in terms not of individual immortal souls going off to heaven, but in terms of God’s Kingdom design for the earth. Our readers should commit themselves to speaking of the Kingdom Gospel at every opportunity. How else are revolutions achieved? How else can the voice of the living Christ be made known?

## Chapter 2: More About the Kingdom

**W**e need to say lots about the Kingdom of God since “Kingdom of God” was really Jesus’ way of speaking of the Christian faith which he taught everywhere and for which he also died. Jesus was driven by the commission which God his Father had given him: to announce the greatest Good News (Gospel) ever — that the Kingdom of God is coming. You really know this already, since almost everyone knows the Kingdom

prayer: “May your Kingdom come!” You do not pray for something to come if it is already here. And Jesus did not say “Your Kingdom spread”! He asked us to pray that the Kingdom would *come*.

Jesus knew the Old Testament well and he knew a verse in Micah 4, which had just the same coming Kingdom in mind. It defines the Kingdom beautifully. “The Lord will rule over them in Mount Zion [Jerusalem]. To you [Jerusalem] it will *come* — the former dominion will come, the *Kingdom* of the daughter of Jerusalem” (Micah 4:7, 8).

This is a restored government, operating from a renewed Jerusalem. This has obviously not yet come to pass.

I trust that our first chapter impressed on you the hopelessness of trying to understand Jesus or the New Testament (or in fact the Old Testament) if we do not get a firm grasp *firstly* on that fact that Jesus always preached the Gospel of the Kingdom. And secondly what Jesus meant by the Kingdom of God. So what did he mean by it?

I want to deal with that question by first tackling a related question: What happens when we die? You will see very soon how that question is closely related to the Kingdom of God. Let me direct your attention to the basic question about what happens to the dead. Where are they when they are dead? Are they really dead or in fact alive somewhere else? We need to understand the answer to this question, as part of our search for understanding on the Kingdom of God, the center of all that Jesus preached.

Where did Jesus get his information about the Kingdom of God and the future of human beings? And about what happens when we die?

The answer to that question lies largely in the Old Testament Bible background which Jesus learned from the synagogue. He learned also of course from his parents, and of course from God who constantly inspired his thinking and all his activity. You will perhaps remember that from the age of 12 Jesus was able to “run circles” around the official doctors of religion of his day. He was “streets ahead” of them in his understanding of the great theological questions. Jesus appeared as a kind of Mozart or Einstein of his day, a prodigy, an exceptionally brilliant exponent of God (of theology) and of the meaning of the universe and of life itself. They were amazed at his questions and answers as he discussed the great issues of life with the religious doctors of his time.

I said that Jesus’ understanding was largely due to his grasp of the Old Testament Bible which he had grown up with. The Old Testament we might reasonably call

“the Hebrew Bible.” It is written in the Hebrew language from Genesis to Malachi. Some parts of Daniel and a very few other passages are written in Aramaic, which is a language like Hebrew. Jesus had the same books in his Bible as you and I have in our Old Testament, 39 books. The *order* of the books was different in the Bible Jesus knew. The books were the same. Jesus actually alluded to that order of the books in Luke 24:44 where he spoke of these precious sacred writings, the Hebrew Bible, as “the law, the prophets and the writings.”

Jesus loved those writings. (Christians who have the spirit and mind of Christ will love them too.) He believed in their inspiration. That means that he believed that God had used the writers of those books to put on paper what God wanted written about His great Plan in world history, and of course His Plan to give immortality to those who chose to listen carefully to God and His agents the prophets, and to the final prophet and Messiah, Jesus. Yes, Jesus was the ultimate prophet. He was also the Son of God. (Luke 1:35 tells us the *basis* for his being the Son of God.) You probably have not heard Jesus called a “prophet” but according to a great prophecy in Deuteronomy 18:15-19 he is called a prophet like Moses, though of course greater than Moses. The New Testament links that prophecy with Jesus in Acts 3:22 and 7:37. Peter in Acts uttered some pretty strong words. He said that every human being who, after clear exposure to the message, will not pay attention and respond to the words of “that prophet,” Jesus, has very little future. He is in terrible trouble with God. He is guilty of a crime worthy of death.

When God inspired the writers of the Old Testament, the Hebrew Bible, as He did later the writers of the New Testament, God’s very mind was expressed. God used the individual talents of the different writers. He did not just impose on them a form of “guided writing” using them as passive instruments. Rather He gave them understanding of His will and purpose. He gave them wisdom. He taught them, sometimes through great trials, and He used them to write the Bible. That is why we refer to the Bible as Scripture, or holy writings. This means that the words of Scripture are reliable and true. It means that the words of Scripture carry the very spirit, mind and heart of God. We can learn how God thinks from the words of the Bible. David was one of the great Bible writers and he put it this way: “The spirit of the Lord spoke by me; His word was in my mouth” (II Sam. 23:2). David’s words were expressions of the mind, spirit and will of God.

As Jesus put it, “the Scripture cannot be broken.” Paul expressed the same truth this way: “All Scripture is given by inspiration of God.” He said in fact that Scripture was “inspired by God.” God breathed His

mind and will and spirit into Scripture so that the words of Scripture tell us exactly what God wanted known. They reveal what God is thinking and what He wants us to know for our own good. The Bible, especially the teachings of Jesus, equips us with the information needed to make sense of life, with all of its difficulties. We can rely on the Bible as a sacred record of what God has communicated to the human race, to help us on the journey of life towards our goal, which is immortality in the Kingdom of God. The Bible tells us where the world is headed, and what we must do to fit into God’s plan. The Scriptures are given us as a great comfort that God is in charge, whatever happens to us. It is our job to find out and follow God’s plan.

You may notice that I did not say that God guides us “on our journey of life towards *heaven*.”

One of the greatest of all confusions and muddles ever to hit the churches is the use of the word “heaven” as the goal of the Christian. Neither Jesus, nor the Bible anywhere, ever spoke of heaven as the goal Christians are aiming at. There is no place called “heaven” in the Bible, meaning a place where your “soul” goes when you die.

You may find this a bit shocking. But I ask you to think deeply about this question of human destiny and destination. I am hoping to convince you that speaking about “heaven” as your future destination is a quick way to get confused about the Bible. I repeat: the Bible never says that when we die, if we are believers in Jesus, we go “to heaven.” It never says that anywhere. Jesus never preached a Gospel about “heaven.” Jesus did not believe in going to heaven when you die. He himself did not go to heaven the day he died.<sup>1</sup> Jesus did not believe that any human being had gone to heaven when he or she died. And Jesus plainly said over and over that those who had died as the faithful in the Old Testament times were still dead in their graves. He never said that they or anyone else had gone to a celestial heavenly mansion, or to a burning hell.

Pick up a New Testament for yourself and simply read, asking yourself, “What objective or goal did Jesus offer his followers?” Where did he ever say “If you want to go to heaven, follow me”? He never said, “You are going to rejoin your dead relatives in heaven.” Much less did Jesus ever imagine that disembodied souls (souls without bodies) had left the earth for a heavenly existence with God.

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<sup>1</sup>Jesus promised the thief that he would be with him in the future paradise or Kingdom of God. The thief asked to be remembered in the future “when you come in your Kingdom.” Jesus replied emphatically that indeed that would happen (Luke 23:43) when he returns.

So you might ask, Where did I learn all that language about “going to heaven”?

The answer is that you learned it by listening to other church members, by singing hymns in church and listening to sermons. But you could not possibly have learned it from the Bible. There is a very important conclusion to be drawn from this amazing fact. It is that huge numbers of churchgoers, united in one great organization, do not often stop to ask themselves about where they learned what they believe and what they understand about their faith. They do not in fact generally ask many questions at all about what they believe. After all, their leader has been trained. He must know. And who are they as pew sitters to question what is taught from the pulpit?

The fact is that countless good Bible scholars of different denominations have complained bitterly about the fact that “heaven in the Bible is nowhere the destination of the dying.”<sup>2</sup> These men have been leaders in the field of Bible studies. But the public either does not bother to read what they have to say, or are simply not interested in a clear understanding of their future hope. (And hope is the second great Christian virtue, along with faith and love. The content of your hope is very important.) For whatever reason, the churchgoing public is content to rely on “what everyone believes” — that is, that at death our “souls” leave our bodies in the grave and we continue to live on. We sing about “John Brown’s body” rotting in the grave while “his soul goes marching on.” We just change our address, from earth to heaven. We shed our physical clothing, our body, and our “immortal soul” soars off to heaven to be with Jesus. One famous hymn speaks of flying off to heaven.

All this may sound comforting, but is it in any way true?

We have all had the “heaven at death” idea enforced at funerals, repeatedly. How many of us have looked at an open casket and thought, Isn’t that a pleasant thought? That the dead person is not really in the coffin? He or she is really somewhere else, enjoying (?) watching us as we grieve over their “departure” to a better place. And we go on reinforcing our grand misunderstanding by speaking of the dead as having “passed away,” which in some vague way seems to mean that they have gone to heaven to be fully conscious with God and Jesus. And we tell our children that dead relatives have just left their clothes, their body, in the grave and have gone off to be with God and Jesus, alive and well.

Of course Christian bookstores confirm our false understanding with popular descriptions of people who

have had “after death” experiences. These people claim to have died and gone to heaven. Somehow these books and not the Bible or Jesus are taken as “gospel-truth.” The public is deluged with the idea that the dead are really alive somewhere else.

But none of this is true.

We must say frankly that anyone who speaks of the dead having gone to heaven does not sound at all like Jesus. Jesus never ever said such a thing, and so people who do use that “heaven when you die” language appear to tell us that they have been listening to the church and not to Jesus and the Bible. I trust that you will accept this as a challenge to further careful study. How is it that the Church, your church perhaps, could be poles apart from Jesus on such an elementary and basic question as “what happens when I die”? If you are prepared to read on, I want to try to convince you from simple Bible verses that the whole popular idea that a man or woman consists of a physical body and a separable conscious soul is just a myth, or should we call it what it really is, a lie.

Is it reasonable that lies should be promoted in the name of Jesus? Is that safe for us and our church, or is it time for us to raise a protest against falsehoods of any sort preached in the name of Jesus, who did not believe what our church teaches? One might even ask whether Jesus would be welcome in our church. He might even be asked politely or impolitely to leave and not come to our church, if he were to report on the dead as he did in the case of Lazarus, his friend. “Lazarus is asleep, Lazarus is dead. I am going to wake him up from the dead” (John 11:11, 14). He did not say Lazarus had gone to heaven! Jesus said he would bring back Lazarus by calling him back *from his tomb*. That is where the dead Lazarus was. He had not gone somewhere else. Nor have your dead relatives. Mary also is dead and buried.

The “grief counseling” of Jesus, as reported by John, sounds radically different from the erroneous counsel offered by churchmen, when they comfort the bereaved with assurances that their relatives are alive and well in “a better place,” heaven.

Do those words of Jesus challenge you, even shock you? I believe they are meant to drive you and me to some earnest thinking. After all, believing falsehoods in the name of Jesus or supporting organizations which promote falsehoods in the name of Jesus is likely to be dangerous. A very risky business, I would think, since Jesus always insisted that we must believe the truth and never falsehoods. That we must always be willing to stand up for him and what he taught against all opposition. And remember that Jesus encountered most opposition, not from the general public, but from the churches (synagogues) of his day. He also warned that

<sup>2</sup> Dr. J.A.T. Robinson of Cambridge, *In the End God*.

“anyone who is ashamed of me and my words, I will be ashamed of him when I come back” (Mark 8:38).

Jesus was a tireless opponent of careless worship. Of worship not based on Scripture but based on tradition, carelessly and thoughtlessly inherited from our parents and perpetuated, unopposed, in our churches. Jesus complained bitterly against teaching tradition rather than truth in church. We are all meant to be intelligent truth-seekers, not passive receivers of unexamined tradition. We must worship God within a framework of “spirit and truth” (John 4:26). “Tradition” which contradicts the Bible is a deadly poison in the church and Jesus issued a forceful warning to this effect (Matt. 15:7-9).

Jesus had learned from the Hebrew Bible a number of very simple basic facts about death. In Ecclesiastes he had read and probably memorized chapter 9:5, 10. We read there a clear statement about the state of the dead. “The dead know nothing at all and they have no more reward. There is no activity or thought or knowledge in Sheol [‘gravedom,’ the world of the dead] to which you are going.” That hardly sounds as if the dead are fully conscious in bliss watching their surviving relatives from a privileged position in heaven. Would that in fact be any sort of privilege? Happily God has arranged things quite differently. He places the dead in a state of unconsciousness, at rest, in their graves until a great future moment. That grand and amazing moment is the event of the resurrection, which will happen when Jesus comes back to inaugurate worldwide his Kingdom of God, the subject of his Gospel. All this is concisely and plainly stated in that wonderful verse in Daniel 12:2. Here is how the dead will one day return from death to life: “Many of those who are sleeping in the dust of the ground will awake...”

In this chapter we have been speaking more about the Kingdom of God. But in order to unfold the biblical story — the greatest story and drama ever — we have had to take up two related subjects: the question of what happens when we die and just briefly the grand future arrival of Jesus back on earth. And why must he come back? To raise the sleeping dead from their graves. And to make possible the great promise contained in his Gospel of the Kingdom. Jesus is coming back to reorganize the whole world so that it works properly and fairly as God intended. Jesus is going to supervise a new world-administration with headquarters in Jerusalem. The Bible, especially the writings of the Hebrew prophets, is simply filled with this information, on page after page. Isaiah 32:1: “There will be a king who reigns uprightly and princes who rule with fair judgment. Behold, a king will reign in righteousness, and princes will rule with

justice. Look, a righteous king is coming! And honest princes will rule under him.”

I wonder if you realize that Jesus’ aim in preaching the Good News about that Kingdom was to invite you to be one of those “honest princes” or princesses, to administer that future world with Jesus? You are called to royal office.

Unfortunately, if you have been listening to a world-famous evangelist who represents millions of believers, you may have learned that “in heaven, we will polish rainbows, tend heavenly gardens and prepare heavenly dishes.”<sup>3</sup> Jesus said nothing at all along those lines. “Polishing rainbows” is frankly just pious nonsense. Jesus invited the public to prepare now to join him in the brand new administration he will introduce when he returns to our planet. “Don’t you realize,” Paul the Apostle said, perhaps a bit frustrated with his audience’s ignorance, “that the saints are going to manage the world? And if the world is going to come under your jurisdiction...” (I Cor. 6:2, Moffat). For Paul this was a most elementary and basic fact about Christianity. “Polishing rainbows in heaven” would have seemed to him quite ludicrous.

I will add here a grand statement from a famous London preacher who hit the nail on the head on this matter of the Christian goal, as well as the heart of the Gospel:

“We shall dwell in glorified bodies *on the glorified earth*. This is one of the great Christian doctrines that has been *almost entirely forgotten and ignored*. Unfortunately the Christian Church — I speak generally — *does not believe this*, and therefore does not teach it. It has lost its hope, and this explains why it spends most of its time in trying to improve life in this world, in preaching politics... But something remarkable is going to be true of us according to the Apostle Paul in 1 Cor. 6:1-3: ‘Dare any of you having a matter against another, go to law before the unjust and not before the saints? Do you not know that the saints shall rule the world?’...*This is Christianity. This is the truth by which the New Testament Church lived*. It was because of this that they were not afraid of their persecutors...This was the secret of their endurance, their patience and their triumphing over everything that was set against them.”<sup>4</sup>

What happens when we die, future resurrection and the future Kingdom. A lot of information to take in in two chapters, you may say. Let us see if we can pull this together clearly in our next chapter. Remember that the

<sup>3</sup>Billy Graham.

<sup>4</sup>Martin Lloyd-Jones, *Commentary on Romans*, pp. 72, 75, 76, emphasis mine.

whole biblical story is about the Kingdom of God and God's great plan to achieve peace on earth. ✧

## Why Not Preach the Gospel from the Words of the Historical Jesus?

One of the most interesting and illuminating conversations one can have with friends (and sometimes even relatives!) concerns the simplest and most basic of all questions: What is the Gospel?

It is our point of view, as well as one of the chief concerns of *Focus on the Kingdom* (since 1998) that evangelists do not preach the Gospel as Jesus preached it! There are historical reasons for this. They go back to the Protestant Reformation of 1517 led by Martin Luther and John Calvin. Luther was so liberated by the notion of the grace of God — as indeed we all should be — that he defined the Gospel from certain New Testament books and *not from others*. As one writer puts it well: Luther formed a canon within the canon. Canon is the word used to describe the authoritative scriptural rule of faith. Luther limited his understanding of the Gospel very largely to Romans, Galatians and I Peter. He found there the famous teaching about being “justified by faith.” What is the problem with this selective use of the New Testament? Simply that it cuts Jesus out as the model preacher of the Gospel.

It is unreasonable and risky to bypass Jesus! Christians claim to be following him. Following him means following his teachings. It is utterly impossible to “follow Jesus” and *not* follow his teachings! Jesus is identified, as we all are, by his words and mind. Christians are to have the “mind of Christ” (I Cor. 2:16) and that mind can be learned by contact with him as teacher and living Savior — by **hearing and understanding his teachings**. Jesus minus his Gospel/teachings is not the real Jesus. It is perilous, if pious sounding, to say “Jesus is the Gospel.” This is often an excuse for vaguely “accepting Jesus” without ever responding to Jesus’ Gospel command: **“Repent and believe the Gospel about the Kingdom of God”** (see Mark 1:14, 15). That is Jesus’ first commandment. Peter noted that the holy spirit is given to those who obey Jesus. Jesus said the same thing: He who disobeys the Son is without life (John 3:36).

The first question, then, in defining the saving Gospel is, **What did Jesus say about how to be saved?**

Check the tracts. Check the Christian bookstores. Pay close attention to sermons on “getting saved,” becoming a believer. Listen to discourses on “justification by faith.” You will find an astonishing absence of reference to the *words of Jesus about how to be saved*. Churchgoers are unwittingly following Luther and his

descendants. Without saying so they are picking individual verses from Paul to construct what is called the Gospel — how to gain everlasting life. They are following the fundamental systematic error of C.S. Lewis who declares: “The Gospel is not in the gospels.” That is quite a mistake!

We suggest that defining the Gospel by ignoring Jesus’ Gospel definition is flawed. It is simply a grand systematic mistake to ignore *the Gospel preaching of Jesus himself*. Yes, Jesus spoke through Paul, but Jesus also preached salvation before his resurrection and ascension. Matthew, Mark, Luke and John are tracts, so to speak, to invite the reader to be saved on the basis of the saving teaching of Jesus *as well as his death and resurrection*. God did not say “Just watch My Son die for you.” He said, “This is My beloved Son: Listen to him!” Indeed Jesus is that prophet forecast by Moses who said that “God will raise up a prophet like me [Moses] from among the children of Israel. Him you are to listen to.”

The New Testament gospels are not just interesting historical monuments designed to record some of Jesus’ activity and miracles. They are permanently valid invitations — summons — to salvation for men and women of all nations.

While Luther and most of the Protestant tradition relies heavily on single verses from Paul’s writings, they have overlooked an important saying of Paul: “If anyone does not agree to the health-giving words, those of the Lord Jesus Christ, he is conceited and knows nothing” (I Tim 6:3, 4). Hebrews 2:3 records a statement which should be posted on every refrigerator: “Salvation was first preached by the Lord Jesus.” Not first by Paul! Paul was indeed a faithful follower of Jesus and Paul carried out the Great Commission of Jesus, who in those famous last words ordered his successors to go to all nations and preach to them everything he (Jesus) had taught. One Gospel of the Kingdom, *first* to the Jews, and then the same Gospel to all the nations until the second coming. One Gospel of the Kingdom and no other. Not one Gospel for Jews and another for Gentiles — a recipe for division and chaos. And certainly not one Gospel for Jews until the crucifixion and then another Gospel for the nations after that. This, again, would be a subtle way of doing away with the preaching of Jesus, relegating it to history, when it is the living life-saving Gospel of salvation for us all now until Jesus returns.

It is misleading to say that “Jesus is the Kingdom.” At least, unless you explain carefully what you mean. Jesus is not the Kingdom. He preached the Kingdom of God. He announced the future coming of the Kingdom and summoned all to repentance in view of that mighty, future event, the event at which the wicked will be

separated from the faithful. The present Christian life is preparation in the *spirit* of the Kingdom for the Kingdom which is coming. The holy spirit is “the spirit of the promise” (Eph. 1:13). The promise is the promise of salvation achieved ultimately in that Kingdom which will come when Jesus arrives back on earth.

Follow Mark (probably reflecting the teaching of Peter) and see how he introduces the Gospel of salvation. His whole book (1:1) is titled the Gospel of Jesus Christ, Son of God. What Gospel did Jesus bring? Mark 1:14, 15: Jesus appeared in Galilee heralding the Gospel about the Kingdom and issuing his first and foundational command: Repent and believe the Gospel about the Kingdom. That is where Jesus begins and that is where Christians should begin.

Now follow Mark’s information about the Kingdom. First he reduces the Kingdom of God (as do the other writers) to the shorthand “word.” Jesus was preaching the word (Mark 2:2) means he was tirelessly preaching his Gospel about the Kingdom.

Jesus unpacked the workings of the Kingdom Gospel by teaching a mixed crowd from a boat that the Kingdom Gospel is **the seed of immortality**. The preacher sows the word of the Kingdom (cp. Matt. 13:19) and that Kingdom Gospel receives a variety of receptions. Some believe only temporarily. They are Christians for a while until the pressures of other agendas crowd out the message and it bears no fruit. Those who hear and understand the Gospel of the Kingdom and persist with it eventually bear fruit. This means that they will successfully enter the Kingdom when Jesus returns to establish it on a renewed earth.

Note carefully that the Kingdom of God, the seed of which is found in the Gospel of the Kingdom, is the goal and final destiny of the believer. It is something *future* to be inherited only in the *future*. Thus Mark places entry into the Kingdom at a time when the wicked are being destroyed at the coming of Jesus (Mark 9:43-48). The Kingdom of God was certainly still future after the death of Jesus. Joseph of Arimathea, a disciple, was correctly still waiting for it! (Mark 15:43). It had not come yet. He was still praying, as we are to, that the Kingdom will come.

Jesus looked forward to the Kingdom at the last supper. He spoke of it as a banquet to be enjoyed when he and his followers would meet again. In none of Mark’s record of Jesus’ teaching does he suggest that the Kingdom of God had already arrived! Certainly the Gospel of the Kingdom was present, the seed of immortality was offered in the Gospel, the spirit as downpayment of the Kingdom must be present in us, but the Kingdom itself lay in the future. It still does. Jesus

spoke of a long delay in one of his parables. “After a long time...” (Matt. 25:19; Luke 20:9). The time has certainly been long but we must continue to wait for the Kingdom and our future salvation in it. Romans 13:11: “Salvation is now closer to us than when we first believed.”

Salvation is to be gained finally (though the process begins now, of course) when the faithful of all the ages are supervising that brilliant new world of the Kingdom, on this earth renewed, in company with Messiah Jesus who is coming back to save us and the world from disaster. ✧

## Comments

“When I was looking for a church that taught what we both believe you asked me why I didn’t start a home church. My wife and I did about 3 1/2 years ago and it has been very rewarding. People come and go, sometimes as few as 5 or 6 and other times 12 to 15, but we are making a difference in sharing the truth. We are studying your life after death programs right now and they are very well received. The last few newsletters have been just great and I had to take up some of your time to just mail you and tell you so...It has been so rewarding to walk in the truth and people are so amazed how simple the word is when you take the traditions of man out and study what the Bible tells us, and hold to that word.” — *Michigan*

“I am still studying your book on the Trinity and thinking back to the part in the intro which stated that belief in One God ‘has never been totally obliterated...but forced to cling tenaciously to the fringes of Christianity as a small but persistent voice, appealing to the conscience of any who would listen.’ I just cried when I read that. Although I was first introduced to the truth about the non-Trinity a few years ago and it was not a totally new concept, I just became so saddened as I felt the truth in the above passage from your book. Thanks again for all you do to help us learn.” — *Colorado*

“Thank you for your lovely paper, *Focus on the Kingdom*. I share it with others every chance I get.” — *Oregon*

“Congratulations on the new book. I have thought and hoped a long time about such a book. It really is needed. Sheep being of full age may be able to sort things out, but Jesus also said feed my lambs — the little ones, and this may fulfill that need.” — *California*

Edward Acton 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](mailto:anthonybuzzard@mindspring.com) to request these. Payment may be made by check or PayPal to [anthonybuzzard@mindspring.com](mailto:anthonybuzzard@mindspring.com).