

## **Making Public your Confession of Jesus as the Messiah and of the God of Israel, the Father of Jesus**

Jesus gave his marching orders to the Church when he addressed his chosen Apostles. He gathered them together and commanded them to relay to all the nations everything he had taught them. He instructed them to baptize in water the converts they made. This was a very clear order. They were to take exactly the same Gospel which Jesus had offered to Jews to all the nations (Matt. 28:19, 20).

There is a widespread theory that a different Gospel would be offered to Gentiles, but this is a huge mistake. There is only one Gospel, one Christianity, and it is founded on the Gospel as Jesus preached it.

Jesus was by then immortal. He had come back from death to life. The tomb was empty and Jesus had appeared to his close followers and had meals with them. “We were the ones who ate and drank with him after he rose from the dead” (Acts 10:41). Jesus had made it quite clear that it was he, Jesus, who had reappeared. He was not some invisible “spirit being,”<sup>1</sup> but a tangible human person who had been resurrected from the dead. He appeared alive in the presence of completely reliable witnesses. Because they had eaten with him, conversed with him, they knew that he had returned from death. His resurrection from death is the greatest fact of world history, backed by irrefutable proofs. There is no room for doubt.

You have to have a lot more “faith” not to believe that Jesus was resurrected. What would be the point of the Apostles testifying to a falsehood, when it cost them much suffering? They even claimed that women had seen him alive first. In those days, women were (quite unfairly) not thought to be dependable sources of information!

Jesus’ disciples knew perfectly well that Jesus was no longer dead. He is the pioneer of God’s great immortality program. We know that this program is true, because Jesus has proved this by appearing alive after his death. God raised him from death to life. He now lives forever. You can too.

To be successful candidates for life in the Kingdom we have to be willing to obey what Jesus says. “He who loves me keeps my orders,” Jesus said (John 14:15). It is pointless to go around claiming to be following Jesus if we reject his plain teachings. Jesus commanded belief in his Gospel of the Kingdom. He also commanded men and women to be baptized in water. This was a public ceremony of initiation into the Church he promised to build. The Apostles, throughout the book of Acts, obeyed Jesus by teaching and baptizing the men and women they converted to the faith.

Paul made it quite clear that no adulterer or fornicator, homosexual who goes on practicing homosexuality, no drunkard, no thief can hope to be in the future Kingdom (1 Cor. 6:9, 10). Our lives have to change drastically. Repentance and a completely new lifestyle are required of Christians. God will not make the immoral or drunks or the other categories listed in 1 Corinthians 6:9, 10 rulers in His Kingdom.

One of the very easy and clear teachings of Jesus is that when we have learned about the Gospel of the Kingdom and are ready to make a decision to believe it, and thus follow Jesus, then we should be baptized in water. A baptized friend who shares your beliefs can perform this baptism. If there are other members of the church available they can be witnesses to this solemn occasion. With a simple prayer one is just dipped in water. This is a public statement of one’s

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<sup>1</sup>Certainly not Michael the archangel as proposed by one large denomination.

intention to be a Christian. Baptism is an apostolic practice because Jesus commanded it. Peter followed the command and commanded it also. He was simply following the orders of his Master.

Jesus commanded water baptism in the Great Commission. He told the Apostles and their successors (we do not have Apostles like the original 12 today, but we must all be disciples of the Apostles) to baptize believers into the joint name of the Father, Son and holy spirit. This has nothing to do with a much later doctrine called the Trinity, that God is three and one. God is just One in the Bible and Jesus is the Son of God, God's agent who reflected his Father's will perfectly and always obeyed his Father. The spirit is the operational power and presence of God and of Jesus. The Apostles obeyed Jesus by baptizing converts "in the name of Jesus," which means representing Jesus. They baptized in his place as his agents. To baptize in the name of Jesus means to baptize as acting on behalf of, representing Jesus and the Kingdom.

Baptism is a symbolic washing away of our former life of rebellion against God and our ignorance of His great Plan. Paul also compares baptism with the death and burial of Jesus and his coming back to life. We start a brand new life when we are baptized to seal our response to Jesus' command to believe his Kingdom Gospel and live the Christian life. We do not need to have years of training before baptism. In the New Testament people committed themselves to Jesus after just some basic teaching, a basic exposure to the Gospel and the aims and claims of Jesus. The eunuch in Acts 8 was instructed by Philip in the fundamentals, and then he asked Philip to baptize him in water and they went down into the water together (Acts 8:36-39).

In Acts 8:12 Philip baptized some Samaritans "when they believed Philip as he preached the Gospel of the Kingdom and the name of Jesus Christ." Men and women got baptized to declare their allegiance to Jesus publicly. Just as Jesus had preached the Kingdom and sown the seed of immortality, so Philip carried on the same Kingdom evangelism. He was planting the seed of immortality in the heart of his converts. In the case of those Samaritans they were the first in the whole nation to become Christians, and they needed a special visit from the Apostles in Jerusalem to complete their introduction into the Church. Peter and John came down from Jerusalem and laid hands on these unique believers and the spirit of God provided a special sign of their position as Christians when they spoke in foreign languages which they had never learned. This was a complete and demonstrable miracle. It certainly does not mean that every convert ever after has to speak in foreign languages unlearned! Today's efforts in some groups to speak in other languages really do not clearly match the public miracle of miraculously spoken languages in the Bible.

Once our commitment to Jesus is sealed in baptism, we must continue to hold fast to the Kingdom Gospel and to Jesus as the Messiah, Son of God for the rest of our days.

We must live within the terms of the Sermon on the Mount which shows how candidates for the Kingdom should conduct their lives. Paul developed those teachings in the letters he wrote to churches and to his young ministers, Titus and Timothy.

The New Covenant introduced by Jesus is not just a repeat of the Old Covenant. Paul spoke of the Law of Christ, as distinct from the Law of Moses. There are two covenants (Gal. 4:24). The Ten Commandments were given to the nation of Israel as a summary of the whole legal system imposed on them. Jesus spiritualized the Law of Moses, getting at the real issue which is that our hearts must be in tune with the will of God and Jesus. "The Law was given by Moses, but grace and truth came through Jesus Christ" (John 1:17). There is a distinct contrast here. We must avoid mixing the two covenants.

For example Israel celebrated the Passover once a year, offering a lamb as a sacrifice in memory of the exodus from Egypt and as a “shadow” of the Messiah promised to come. The New Testament church, now that Jesus has come, replaced the annual Passover with the regular celebration of the Lord’s supper, remembering the sacrificial death of Jesus and looking forward to his future coming and their reunion with him in the Kingdom (Luke 22:14-30).

We should celebrate daily the great fact that the Father “is the only one who is truly God” (John 17:3), as Jesus said. Paul rehearsed the same great fundamental truth when he wrote to Timothy: “There is one God and one mediator between the one God and man, the Messiah Jesus, himself man” (1 Tim. 2:5). Paul also urged Timothy to preach the Kingdom of God Gospel in season and out of season: “I solemnly declare to you as Gospel, before God and Jesus who is going to judge both the living and the dead, both his coming and his Kingdom. Preach the word” (2 Tim 4:1, 2).<sup>2</sup> Paul warned that the time was going to come when audiences would not put up with Truth but heap up teachers who would “tickle their ears” and tell them what they wanted to hear (2 Tim. 4:3).

The solemn fact about the Kingdom and God’s plan remains at the heart of Christianity. God has appointed a day when He is going to judge and administer the world by a man whom He has chosen. “God has set a day for judging the world with justice by the man He has appointed, and He proved to everyone who this is by raising him from the dead” (Acts 17:31). That coming day is the Kingdom of God for which we are to prepare diligently. Jesus has risen from the dead and in company with him and believing him and his teachings, we can be assured of resurrection when he comes back.

God has demonstrated His intention to confer immortality on human beings. “He has proved His intention by raising the man Jesus from the dead” (Acts 17:31). With that wonderful account of the ongoing, unfolding immortality-Kingdom Plan of God firmly in mind, let us rejoice in the hope set before us and strive to enter the Kingdom of God.

Let Jesus’ words of warning go with us as we proceed on the journey of faith:

Do your best to go in by the narrow door, for I say to you, a number will make the attempt to go in, but will not be able to do so. When the master of the house has got up and shut the door, and you, still outside, knock on the door, saying, “Lord, let us in”; he will answer, “I have no knowledge of where you come from.” Then you will say, “We have taken food and drink with you, and you were teaching in our streets.” But he will say, “Truly, I have no knowledge of you or where you come from; go away from me, you workers of evil.” There will be weeping and cries of sorrow when you see Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, and all the prophets, in the Kingdom of God, but you yourselves are shut outside. And they will come from the east and from the west, from the north and from the south, and take their places in the kingdom of God. And the last will be first, and the first will be last (Luke 13:24-30).

The promise of the Gospel of the Kingdom, the teachings of Jesus, including his sacrificial death for our sins, provide the rock foundation on which our Christianity must be based.

The death of Jesus was substitutionary, as theologians say. The sacrifice of Jesus, foreshadowed by the whole sacrificial system involving animals under the Old Covenant, covers our sins. We are thus “covered” and protected from the death penalty, because Jesus bore it in our place. One life, Jesus’ life, covers another when the one life is surrendered in love so that the other can be spared. “Behold and see if there has been any sorrow comparable to my sorrow,”

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<sup>2</sup>I take the appearing and Kingdom as the direct objects of the verb “solemnly declare as Gospel” (*diamarturomai*).

says Lamentations 1:12, speaking of God's punishment of Jerusalem. The Messiah was innocently "a man of sorrows" (Isa. 53:3), facing the appalling blindness and stubbornness of religionists, and he was "acquainted with grief." God "laid on him the iniquity of us all" (Isa. 53:6).

Nothing is more important than to understand that the Gospel is the Gospel of the Kingdom and nothing is more valuable than our full commitment to that Gospel, which is equated by Jesus as commitment to himself. Jesus spoke of the Gospel of the Kingdom as simply "the Gospel" or even his "name," that is, everything he stood for, his agenda.

In Mark 10:29, 30 Jesus said, "Amen, I say to you, there is no one who has given up house or brothers or sisters or mother or father or children or lands for my sake and for the sake of *the Gospel*, who will not get a hundred times as much now in this time, houses, and brothers, and sisters, and mothers, and children, and land — though with great troubles; and, in the age to come, eternal life."

Now notice how Matthew reported that saying: "And everyone who has given up houses or brothers or sisters or father or mother or children or property, *for my sake*, will receive a hundred times as much in return and will have eternal life" (Matt. 19:29).

Luke thinks of commitment to the Kingdom of God, which is the same idea in different words: "And he said to them, 'Truly I say to you, there is no man who has given up house or wife or brothers or father or mother or children, *because of the Kingdom of God*, who will not get much more in this time, and in the age to come, eternal life'" (Luke 18:29, 30).

Only one Kingdom is going to survive. Only one Kingdom has permanent value. It is the Kingdom announced by Jesus as the Christian Gospel — the Kingdom he commands us to "seek first" and pray with urgency for its coming, so that the world may enjoy peace, at last.

This is our destiny, yours and mine, and the answer to the puzzle of the meaning of life.