

Focus on the Kingdom

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The Jesus Priorities

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Before the destruction of the northern kingdom of Israel (or Ephraim) by Assyria in about 722 BCE, Hosea and Amos both spoke out forcefully to these people, offering stern rebukes for religious errors (mainly idolatry), along with blatant, oppressive social corruption. Despite such darkness leading to imminent national destruction and the urgency of the call for repentance, a vast, restorative hope is repeatedly offered, such as in Amos 9:8-15. Within this tumultuous context, Amos uttered the following in 8:11-12:

“There, days are coming (a declaration of the Lord Yahweh) when I shall send famine throughout the country — not famine of bread, nor thirst for water, but rather of hearing Yahweh’s words. People will wander from sea to sea and roam from north to east to seek Yahweh’s word, but they won’t find it” (*The First Testament*).

We know from other Scriptural statements (like 2 Pet. 3:9; 1 Tim. 2:4; Acts 17:30-31) that God in fact earnestly desires that all folks come to repentance (a profoundly changed mindset), while acquiring salvation through the knowledge of the truth! Why then the dire warning by Amos about a famine of *hearing Yahweh’s words*? Perhaps, just as in ancient times, now in modern times, people must get deeply disentangled from distorted *priorities*, profusely experienced in widely confused social/religious contexts, *before* even being able to genuinely *seek Yahweh’s words* without vague, muddled results! Undoubtedly, we live in an era in which a diverse plethora of religious and political opinions clamor loudly (and often quite divisively) for exclusive attention. Thus, the thought of a dire famine of *really hearing Yahweh’s words* might well be relevant! Maybe, on one hand, folks nowadays get easily enticed to hop on the next popular, erroneous bandwagon. On the other hand, they might get so bombarded by distinct views of what is real, that they are tempted to take **all** truth claims very lightly; they cynically throw up their hands in frustration and say: “Whatever!”

As a simple *back to basics* solution, it might be wise to pay close attention to the key priorities which Jesus himself carefully stressed in the four gospels, while also taking into account their roots in the Hebrew

Scriptures. As a starting place, here is a brief overview of what I am here calling “**The Jesus priorities**”:

- (1) Jesus’ creed
- (2) his prominent prayer
- (3) his basic teaching emphasis, and
- (4) his declared mission.

As we briefly peruse this information, we can simply ask ourselves, “Do such topics truly fit together in a coherent way? Or, are such ‘priorities’ merely a futile exercise in disjointed tidbits of random ideas?”

The Creed of Jesus

When asked (Mark 12:28-34a) by a scribe, an expert in the Law, about the top *priority* of all the commandments, Jesus did not hesitate; he replied with the Shema (meaning “Listen”), citing Deuteronomy 6:4-5 and then combining it with Leviticus 19:18: “Jesus replied, ‘The most important commandment is: Listen, Israel! The Lord our God is one Lord. Love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul, with all your mind, and with all your strength. The second is, Love your neighbor as yourself. There is no more important commandment than these’” (Mark 12:29-31).

The expert in Jewish teaching (v. 32-33) wholeheartedly and unreservedly agreed with Jesus by emphasizing three points: (1) “Right, Teacher, you have spoken on the basis of truth in saying that He is one, and there is no one else besides Him,” (2) “and to love Him with all your heart, all your understanding, and all your strength” (3) “and to love your neighbor as yourself is more important than all burnt offerings and sacrifices.” In v. 34a we see that Jesus noticed that the scribe had answered thoughtfully or intelligently, so he said, “You are not far from the Kingdom of God.”

Neither Jesus nor the scribe downplayed the supreme importance of the true God (Yahweh in Deut. 6:4-5) *being one!* In fact, Jesus himself never, ever diminished the unique role of God as the heavenly Father; he continually declared such phrases: “My Father is greater than I”, “My Father is greater than all”, “from the only God”, “this is the life of the age to come: that they may know You, the only true God...”, “I am ascending to my Father and your Father, to my God and your God” and many other statements to support his unitary *creed!* Fortunately, there is a current abundance of scholarship to clarify this topic, and to biblically and historically refute the speculative doctrines (like modalism, Binitarianism, Trinitarianism, etc.) which

later invaded and distorted Christianity. It is certain that people cannot really follow Jesus without honestly adhering to *his creed!*

Jesus never modified the Shema itself, but he did offer a spiritually **innovative** perspective by elevating Leviticus 19:18 (loving one's neighbor as oneself) to being the second great commandment. The scribe in Mark 12 agreed that this second *top priority* trumps the Torah's requirements of burnt offerings and sacrifices. Interestingly, in another context in which Jesus called attention to these two top priorities (Luke 10:25-37), the scribe present, who wanted to justify himself, asked about the identity of his neighbor (v. 29). When Jesus spoke, giving a vivid parable, he used the roles of two Torah observant people, a priest and a Levite, whose strict *priority* was to avoid potential ritual contamination (as in Lev. 21:1-2 and Num. 19:11-17). Perhaps, to avoid having contact with a dead (or soon to be dead) person, they both walked by instead of offering help. In contrast to the priest and the Levite, the "Samaritan" (ironically, a person despised as impure by zealous Jews) is the active model to emulate as being a compassionate "neighbor," according to *Jesus' bold priorities*.

As new covenant norms, obviously pioneered by Jesus himself, developed in the gospels and other N.T. writings, it became abundantly clear that a bulk of old covenant standards, including those which starkly separated Jews from Gentiles (such as required circumcision, strict food laws, calendar observances, animal sacrifices, etc.) have become obsolete — due in part to Jesus' strong "love your neighbor" priorities. Jesus himself lovingly brought Gospel/salvation insights to Samaritans (John 4) and healing to folks who were not Israelites (Matt. 15:21-28; Luke 7:1-10; Luke 17:11-17) despite the fact that his professed mission was only to the lost sheep of the house of Israel (Matt. 10:5-6; 15:24).

In commenting briefly about some practical factors involved in loving one's neighbor as a top priority (supremely exalted by Jesus), one can focus wisely on an extremely wide range of Scriptural directives, ethical norms, and insightful examples! For example, when Jesus challenged the rich young man in Mark 10:17-22, he exhorted him concerning his *priority* regarding personal wealth (v. 21) because he (Jesus) felt **love** for him, offering him future Kingdom treasure (i.e. "treasure in heaven"). In the context of the Leviticus 19:18 command about *loving one's neighbor*, verse 17a states, "You shall not hate your fellow countryman in your heart; you may surely reprove your neighbor." Such necessary, loving reproofs at specific times are beautifully balanced by the tactful gentleness clearly *required* of God's servants (2 Tim. 2:24-26). Not only should we be involved with "warning the

unruly"; we should also be proactive to "comfort the faint hearted, to help the weak, to be patient with them all," according to 1 Thessalonians 5:14.

Yes, there are times to exhibit *tough love*, as Stephen did in Acts 7 towards an obstinate audience, (and as Jesus also did, quite often), provided that one is as deeply forgiving as Stephen (7:60), corresponding to how Jesus had an extensively forgiving heart (Luke 23:34).

Back in Mark 12:34 we previously noticed that Jesus was well aware of the scribe's intelligent response, and told him he was not far from the Kingdom of God. As we will soon see, "Kingdom of God" vocabulary is not vague speech for present, ethereal realities, but it is directed toward concrete promises of immense future renovation.

The Prominent Prayer of Jesus

There was a popular, two-part prayer practiced among devout Jews during Jesus' ministry called the Kaddish:

1. "Magnified and sanctified be His great Name in the world He created according to His will.

2. May He establish His Kingdom during your life and during your days, and during the life of all the house of Israel, even speedily and at a near time: say Amen."

It is not hard to see the direct parallel here with the first two parts of the prominent prayer (Matt. 6:9-10; Luke 11:2) taught by Jesus:

1. Sanctified be Your Name

2. May Your Kingdom come and Your will be done on earth

Nevertheless, just as Jesus expanded the Shema's declaration (Deut. 6:4-5) about God being one and loving Him with all one's being, by elevating the Leviticus 19:18 priority to love one's neighbor as oneself, he does something quite similar with his primary prayer.

In addition to (1) Regarding God's name as holy and (2) professing faith in God's coming Kingdom and God's will being done on earth (during a renewed future), Jesus, in essence, adds to these two top priorities of the traditional Kaddish prayer. He adds three panoramic aspects of what might be called *intercessory prayer* (Matt. 6:11-13), prayer for one another: (3) the collective petition for daily bread needs, (4) asking for our mutual forgiveness (as we are honestly diligent to forgive others), and (5) protection and guidance when tempted or tried, being delivered from the evil one's attacks.

As in the previously studied **creed of Jesus** according to which we honor God uniquely as the one He truly is, loving Him with all our heartfelt effort, and then loving our neighbor in the same way in which

Jesus himself modeled bona fide love toward other people (John 13:34-35), our prayer life should be expansive and dynamic. First we pray that God's name as the heavenly Father be held in awe, since He is holy, and that His ultimate Kingdom agenda come to pass here on the land (or on earth) as He has promised. And we also pray fervently, meanwhile, for one another's essential needs in terms of daily bread supplies, complete forgiveness, and rescue from evil.

In both (1) *the creed of Jesus* and (2) *the prominent prayer of Jesus* we have seen a stated connection to the Kingdom of God. Why such a repeated focus?

The Basic Teaching Emphasis of Jesus

Of the varied parables (comparative illustrations) which Jesus taught, one is regarded as foundational to understanding all the rest: "If you don't understand this parable [the illustration about the sower and the four soils], how will you understand any of the parables?" (Mark 4:13). In this context Jesus had stated, "The revealed secret of the Kingdom of God has been given to you" (4:11a). In the Matthew 13 version of this same parable, v. 19 explains that when the sower's seed fell along the path, it means that "when anyone hears **the message of the Kingdom** and doesn't understand it, the Evil One snatches away what was sown in their heart." Of course, in the context, only one of the four responses to the Gospel of the Kingdom produces worthwhile fruit, the one who constantly perseveres in the message. Matthew 13 then goes on to give a whole series of Kingdom-oriented comparisons: weeds among wheat, a mustard seed, leavening dough, a treasure buried in a field, a pearl of great price, and a dragnet cast into the sea. Some pictures demonstrate vital calls to respond **now** and grasp the supreme value of the Kingdom, and others portray future times of restoration and judgment.

Mark 1:1's opening about the Gospel of Messiah Jesus, the Son of God, quickly shows John the Baptist's preliminary role in preaching and conducting a baptism of *repentance* (v. 4), followed by Jesus' own heralding of God's Gospel, saying, "The time is fulfilled, and the Kingdom of God is at hand. Repent [have a genuine change of mindset] and believe in that Gospel" (v. 14-15).

In about 118 instances of specific Kingdom vocabulary used by Jesus, the future fulfillment — a literal empire to be administered by "the Son of Man" and the saints who faithfully believe him — is always in view. Matthew 5:5's possession of the *land* (the earth) for the gentle is a quoting of Psalm 37's repeated emphasis, in which the land is promised to the humble. We have already seen the coming Kingdom idea in the prayer Jesus taught us; furthermore, Matthew 6:33 notes that we should seek **first** His Kingdom and be

right with Him. Though **now** is the time to respond correctly to the Kingdom Gospel, by dedication to obeying his meaningful words, the actual arrival of the Kingdom involves the future implementation of a new worldwide order when Messiah Jesus returns, as clearly seen in Matthew 19:28-29; Luke 19:11-27; 22:28-30, etc.

This whole glorious, renovated earth picture in which God's never-ending **reign** (to abolish former, corrupt human empires), along with the active participation of "saints" (meaning believers who have been made holy) is a solid promise. This scenario had been the subject of several prophecies beforehand, as seen quite clearly in Daniel 2:44-45 and 7:13-14, 18, 22, 27. Resurrection from among the dead, when faithful believers will be rewarded, is a vital part of this entire picture (Dan. 12:2-3; John 5:25, 28-29; 1 Cor. 15:20-23; Rev. 11:15-18).

There is no doubt that a scholarly overview of **Jesus' basic teaching emphasis** indicates this dramatic Kingdom goal of history when Jesus returns. The righteous, non-violent empire (Isaiah 2:1-4) of which Jesus urgently prophesied is **not** a reign of good, positive ideas or feelings *in one's heart* (according to poor translations and errant interpretations of Luke 17:20-21), which badly fail to take into account the nearby context of 17:26-35 and 21:5-36. Nor is the coming Kingdom the current spread of "the church," a prevalent way of thinking which is terribly misguided!

The Declared Mission of Jesus

Before briefly looking at what can be called the specific *mission statement* of Jesus, it might be wise to consider a few antecedents concerning the idea of the Good News (or Gospel) having been previously heralded. You might be familiar with the concept in Galatians 3:8, "As it is foretold in Scripture that God would make right the Gentiles by believing, so the Gospel [Good News] was preached ahead of time to Abraham..." The context, (including the times of Abraham which are recorded in Genesis, chapter 12ff), involves Abraham's having truly believed God, God's promise of descendants (especially one specific "seed"), the inheritance of *land* in a real, physical way (as *not* yet fulfilled, Acts 7:4-5), and blessings on all nations.

Furthermore, three passages, within the context of the victorious, restorative future promised to Israel throughout Isaiah 40-66 might be instructive here, as these words brightly announce the **Good News** of realities to come, and Yahweh's ultimate intervention to tenderly care for his people! My emphasis is added in these references, starting with Isaiah 40:9-11a:

"Get yourself up to a high mountain, O Zion, **herald of good news [Gospel]**, lift up your voice

mightily, O Jerusalem, **herald of good news**; lift it up, do not fear. Say to the cities of Judah, 'Here is your God!' Behold, the Lord God comes with might, and His **arm** rules for Him. Behold, His reward is with Him and his recompense before Him. Like a shepherd He will tend to His flock, in His **arm** He will gather the lambs."

By the way, the **arm** of the LORD might very well be a metaphor designating the future presence of the Messiah to represent God. See Isaiah 52:10, 53:1, and Luke 1:51.

"How beautiful on the mountains are the feet of the messenger who announces peace, **who brings good news [Gospel]** of happiness, who announces salvation, who says to Zion, '**Your God reigns!**'" (Isa. 52:7). The context of this verse indicates that **God will reign**, in a mighty revamping event involving "new heavens and a new earth" (Isa. 65:17-18).

Isaiah 61:1-2 has a statement which Jesus partially quoted in Luke 4:17-21, regarding things he *did* accomplish and *will* accomplish: "The spirit of the Lord God is upon me, because He anointed me to **bring good news [Gospel]** to the oppressed, to bind up the broken hearted, to proclaim liberty to captives and release to the prisoners, to proclaim the year of the LORD's favor, and the day of vengeance of our God." In this study we have already pointed out passages in Daniel, chapters 2 and 7, which likewise describe this future, glorious Kingdom.

So, when Jesus proclaimed his precise **mission statement** in Luke, it is totally in line with these former **good news** declarations in Isaiah. Luke 4:43 from *The Second Testament*: He [Jesus] said to them that "It's also necessary for me to gospel other cities about God's Empire, because for this I was commissioned." To gospel (as a verb) simply means to evangelize or "announce *good news*."

Effectively, Gabriel even heralded the *good news* beforehand to Mary when he said, "You will name him Jesus. He will be great...and the Lord God will give him the throne of his ancestor David. He will reign over the house of Jacob forever, and of his Kingdom there will be no end" (Luke 1:31-33).

This future Kingdom message was never rescinded, but it continued to be heralded persuasively throughout the entire book of Acts (1:3, 6-7; 8:12; 14:22; 19:8; 20:24-25; 28:23, 31). According to Jesus, **this** Gospel of the Kingdom, which he himself heralded (not a vague, washed out version of it), is to reach folks in all nations (Matt. 24:14) before the close of this age! So, not only is the Kingdom of God the embodiment of the panoramic picture of the future hope of vast renewal, it is also the essential Gospel, the brilliant Good News to still be lovingly heralded.

Conclusion

The Jesus Priorities, which we have briefly highlighted, truly give *responsible* attention to his vital words:

(1) his creed (his unitary understanding of God and his essential two-part love focus),

(2) his prominent prayer which highly honors God while tenderly addressing relevant needs of fellow humans,

(3) his basic Kingdom emphasis in teaching, and

(4) his Kingdom-oriented mission to tirelessly herald the Gospel, which is *good news* indeed!

Coming Kingdom detailed promises, as studied briefly here, vibrantly link all four of these priorities, which are often badly *ignored* in modern, popular religion!

We will close by noting a couple of other primary biblical realities which help fill out the **priority** picture we have been viewing. 1 Corinthians 15:3-9, in highlighting truths regarding Jesus' death for our sins and his resurrection from among the dead, indicates that these two key events are "among matters of first importance" (citing the OGF translation of verse 3¹). The reconciling, sacrificial death of Jesus and the resurrection from among the dead (on the third day) are not, however, **the whole gospel!** His words, including urgent Kingdom preaching, are obviously emphasized! In fact, Jesus and the Apostles heralded the Kingdom Gospel (Good News) very successfully for a couple of years, **well before** beginning to announce his upcoming death and resurrection (which Jesus *started* to announce in Matt. 16:21). The modern, sad, "dispensational" tendency to **downplay** and even **disregard** Jesus' incisive Kingdom words, while *only* exalting certain redemptive truths, moves very *far away* from exact biblical contexts! What a travesty to sternly avoid!

While it is undoubtedly true that Jesus' extensive, substitutionary death (1 John 2:2) is for the merciful forgiveness of our sins, the Kingdom-Gospel context (of implementing changed priorities to obey his words) remains just as true! It is mentioned (in Luke 24:47) **after** Jesus' death and resurrection, "That repentance [a changed mindset] for the forgiveness of sins would be proclaimed in his name to all nations..." Jesus' Kingdom-Gospel agenda is certainly implied by the phrase "in his name."

We can wholeheartedly embrace what is lovingly accomplished by Jesus' sacrificial death and resurrection (a prototype of the future resurrection of others: 1 Cor. 15:20-23). However, we should joyfully accept such redemptive truths **within the wide context** of obediently, responsibly heeding **the Jesus**

¹ onegodtranslation.com

priorities, as solidly expressed by his Kingdom-oriented words of life. ✧

Do You Give a Rip?

by Barbara Buzzard

“Ah, but rip is a diamond of a word, buried deep in the earliest Indo-European languages, cut into different meanings by various trades...and by creative plain folks.”² In early American and British slang, a rip was an old, broken-down horse. The word has a sense of worthlessness. The Scottish and English meaning of it is rubbish, anything without value. “I don’t give a rip” is rather like saying “I couldn’t care less,” or “It doesn’t matter to me in the slightest.” It is similar to saying, “Go ahead and ruin your life. I don’t give a hoot,” or even “give a fig!”³

While this word is not theological or even elegant, I like it. I hear it as a searing, penetrating question that we all should be asked. When all else is gone, when we are stripped bare of societal foundations, of cultural and moral principles, when we have lost confidence in leaders, of both government and religion — what do you “give a rip” about? Is ours not a faith worth fighting for? What we are seeing feels like moral and intellectual disarmament. Our ideals have been assaulted, our “Thus saith the Lord” rock solid truths excised from the text through clever but deceptive interpretation.

Paul warned that “false teachers, like vicious wolves, will come in among you...not sparing the flock. Even some of you will distort the truth in order to draw a following. Watch out!” (Acts 20:30-31). Do we not behave as though this only applies to the Acts church? A sense of calm and safety as one enters church could well be dangerous as it is not the Bible’s advised “watch out” approach. *Since sound doctrine renders men sound and unsound doctrine renders them profane*⁴ — it is a matter of extreme urgency that in these perilous times we align ourselves with Scripture. We must be hyper-vigilant. We must *think hard* when dealing with Scripture. We need pivotal anchor points so as not to be derailed. We need to examine and compare 1) tried and true methods with 2) new and “improved” ones. We must be aware of bias in thought as in the use of the word “obnoxious” below:

“Yet resistance to the eschatological way of interpreting Jesus’ teaching has continued and is still probably the dominant attitude among Christians

² William Safire, “On Language: Let ‘Er Rip,” *New York Times*, Nov. 28, 1993.

³ It is possible that the word rip was substituted so as not to swear. Only in 1967 did the word rip-off come into vogue meaning theft via swindling.

⁴ 1 Tim. 1:5, 9.

generally. This ascription of eschatological expectations to Jesus has been *obnoxious* to the liberal, who desires to make Jesus immediately useful without reference to the apostolic message about him, and also to the devout, who is unwilling to ascribe to Jesus unfulfilled expectations.”⁵

To Die For?!

All too often the phrase “to die for” is used of frivolous and short-lasting things. It would be so good for us as Christians if we were to eliminate this phrase from our speech; it might force us to think about our words and our language. Maybe it would even improve our mental functions as we measure what we think is important. Consider this: Servetus was a brilliant Spaniard who discovered pulmonary circulation and wrote *On the Errors of the Trinity*, a theological masterpiece, at a young age, having mastered Greek and Hebrew. “Servetus, whose biblical scholarship even at nineteen was colossal, knew that nothing of the Nicene Creed was stated or even hinted at in the Scriptures, which he had read in the original Hebrew and Greek. While studying the Bible at Toulouse he had found ‘not one word about the Trinity, nor about its Persons, nor about Essence, nor about a unity of the Substance.’ The trinity was a contrivance — sheer mysticism — and Christianity could never be purified until it was stripped away.”⁶

John Calvin, known as the Reformer, determined that Servetus should die as a heretic because he refused to subscribe to the Trinity. Calvin had Servetus put to death because he refused to alter his beliefs and language about Jesus. Servetus believed that Jesus was the “Son of the Eternal God” and refused to say “Eternal Son of God.” As Bernard Cottret wrote in his biography of Calvin: “Servetus died, burned alive, on the plain of Champel at the gate of Geneva...after committing a terrible error in syntax; he cried out, ‘Oh Jesus, son of eternal God, have pity on me!’ in place of saying, as was proper, ‘Oh Jesus, eternal son of God.’ His punishment was due to the misplacing of a single adjective.”⁷ Just the juxtaposition of that word “eternal” could have saved his life!

Servetus was given the option of reneging his stance on the Father alone being God. It is said that as he was led to his funeral pyre he was being urged to recant. The fervency of his belief that the Father is the only God was so strong that he was willing to die for it.

⁵ Clarence Craig, quoted in *The Interpreter’s Bible*, p. 152, emphasis added.

⁶ Lawrence and Nancy Goldstone, *Out of the Flames*, p. 68.

⁷ Bernard Cottret, *Calvin: A Biography*, 2000, p. 225.

Surely these are memorable facts! Servetus was tried and agonizingly *burned at the stake* as a heretic. Few even know his name and fewer still regard him as a hero in the faith, and yet he was a figurehead of history. His revolutionary act marked a turning point as a gigantic step toward free expression and ultimately for free speech. The *enormity of Servetus' courage* is hard to grasp.⁸

Does that not make us ashamed to use the phrase “to die for” in a shallow, thoughtless, and frankly insulting way? If you had a beloved teacher or friend who was being verbally assassinated and you knew that what was being spoken wasn’t true, I believe you would care. How do we live out a defense of Jesus? The “to die for” phrase is all the more unsuitable considering that complacency is the order of our day.

Why Servetus Had to Die: The Constraints of Orthodoxy

The context: “There was a bishop named Arius, a Libyan, who was preaching that while God, the Father, was timeless, infinite, and divine, Jesus, the Son, was created by God and subordinate to the Father, and therefore not divine, or at least not as divine as the Father. For the Church hierarchy the problem with this interpretation — one that was to plague Christianity for more than a millennium — was that if Jesus was concluded to be less than divine, he might have been simply a man made divine through faith and acts. And if *that* were true, might not that same potential be available to all men? *And if that were so, how could the Church hold itself to be the irreplaceable intermediary between men and God, a position from which, even back in the fourth century, it derived its enormous political power?*”⁹ Why did Servetus have to die? *Because the church willed it to preserve a specious doctrine, i.e. because the church said so.*

The Court Will Convene

N.T. Wright has said that we must announce to the governments of this world that their time is up and that it is Jesus who is Lord, and they are not.¹⁰ He urges us to deny the quest for material things, an idol which must be shamed. He warns that the love of war appeals to all that is worst in us and makes the world a worse place. In this same lecture he calls upon us to resist paganism in all its forms. In his urging the church to be faithful, he sees the danger of *complacency*.

⁸ Please see the story of John Calvin in the April edition of *Focus on the Kingdom*: “Was John Calvin a Christian in Name Only?” by Clark Barefoot.

⁹ Goldstone, *Out of the Flames*, p. 65,66, emphasis added.

At least seven times in Scripture we are told to “*See to it that you are not deceived.*”¹¹ In other words, *beware, watch out!* Dear readers, these are our marching orders. We are faced today with more delusions than ever, and those behind those delusions are working harder than ever to “see to it” that we are deceived. If we don’t fight back equally hard, we *will be* deceived.

See to it that no one deceives you! If ever the wool was pulled over our eyes, if ever we were duped, if ever there was a worldwide deception — it would be that of saying that the baby in the womb is only a fetus. The Latin word “fetus” means “offspring, bringing forth” — in other words, a baby! A faulty distinction with no difference!

Most people would agree that if having to rescue only a limited number of personal items from a fire or flood or other disaster, they would always include photos with their other precious items. What would be the parallel in matters of faith? What would you cling to, be unwilling to sacrifice and risk personal harm to save? What are the non-negotiables of faith? What would you die for? I am painfully aware that it is impossible to make someone care. However, it may still be possible to help someone to *see*. Give a few moments reflection to what really matters when all else is lost. When businessmen are nearing the end of their lives it is often said that they regret spending so much time at the office. What, as a person of faith, would you have to regret? *We are blessed to be able to contemplate these things before the court convenes.* When death, the great equalizer, threatens — what would be the most pressing and earnest issues? What would you most wish to have left as your legacy?

We are the people Jesus went to the cross “to die for.” Do we not owe him the greatest allegiance possible? And that allegiance is shown in our modeling the same values and *believing* the same things that Jesus did. Jesus cared desperately about truth and falsehood. *Therefore, so must we.* When our founder’s reason for being, his very creed is dismantled, ignored, substituted for, deviated from — do we give a rip? Are we responsible for protecting his name, his honor, his purpose? If we were to do a comparison test: what are we most exercised about in our daily lives? And how does that compare with how exercised, how passionate we are about our God and Jesus, *and what is said about them and their teaching?* Truth is the hope of the world. Hope is the golden thread we live on. ✧

¹⁰ In a lecture, quoted in Brian Zahnd, *Postcards from Babylon*.

¹¹ Matt. 24:4; Mark 13:5; Luke 21:8; Col. 2:8; Heb. 12:15, 25 (see also 1 Cor. 6:9; 15:33; Gal. 6:7; Eph. 5:6; Col. 2:4; 2 Thess. 2:3; 1 John 3:7).

Those Appointed to Reign

“Jesus is represented in the Gospels as teaching that the days of his own ministry were *the days of the preaching of the reign of God* (Luke 16:16)...Even now, in the days of his preaching, men could accept or reject God’s reign; they could, as it were, anticipate for their own personal existence the day of the Lord; they could in an eschatological sense even now pass through judgment and find salvation. But the fact that the great decision could be taken by those who heard Jesus proclaiming the drawing nigh of God’s reign **must not mislead us into supposing that the reign of God had already arrived** in any other sense than that the preaching is an eschatological anticipation of it...

“Nor must we allow the **Hebraic manner of speaking of a future event in the past tense** to mislead us into an interpretation of certain texts which would be at variance with the whole New Testament eschatological programme: ‘the Kingdom of God has come upon you’ (Matt. 12:28 = Luke 11:20; cf. Luke 10:18 and **1 Thess. 2:16**) must mean in its context that the exorcisms wrought by Jesus are the signs of the coming victory of the Kingdom of God over the counter-kingdom of Satan...

“[Jesus] thought of himself as the new Moses (Deut. 18:15, 18) leading a new people of God by a greater redemption than that of the exodus from Egypt into the Promised Land of the Age to Come...The expression ‘enter the Kingdom of God’ **means much more than to become a subject of God’s Kingdom**; it means to receive a share in God’s Kingship, **to be one of those appointed to reign**...As the old Israel obtained the inheritance of the Promised Land, so the new Israel shall possess the earth as its inheritance.”

Alan Richardson, *An Introduction to the Theology of the New Testament*, 1958, p. 85-87

“Certainly the prophets do not think of heaven. Plows and pruning hooks have as little to do with heaven as swords and spears. And what has the high place of Mount Zion to do in heaven? Therefore our passage [Isa. 2:2-4] speaks for the view that one time, and that, too, here on this earth, the Lord shall appropriate the kingdom (Isa. 60:21; Matt. 5:5), suppress the world kingdoms and bring about a condition of peace and glory.”

Lange’s *Commentary* on Isaiah, 1878, p. 57

Comments

• “I have enjoyed *Focus on the Kingdom* for many years. Questions I have had are answered in this publication and for that I am grateful. God bless you and continue on with the good fight.” — *Arizona*

• “Thank you for bringing Wiley Jones’ work to our attention (“How to Study the Bible,” May). The excerpt lends itself nicely for some evangelical work. And your thoughts on the word ‘aionios’ went well with the Kingdom message. Its importance is great in the light of churchianity, and so few know about the point.” — *Canada*

• “I want to take a moment to let each of you know how deeply I appreciate all the work you do. God leading me to you changed my life for the better, and I will be forever grateful. Whenever I have an opportunity, I tell others about you. I was able to give the booklet *What Happens When We Die?* to a dear friend whose 12-year-old great-grandson died, and she loved reading it.” — *Illinois*

• “I am constantly thanking God for providentially guiding my steps to run across this ministry. I always questioned the unexplainable that many accepted as truth. I am encouraged by all your articles and studying to show myself approved for the glory of the Most High. I share this new-found but ancient teaching with all who aren’t held captive by tradition.” — *Florida*

• “In 2009 a lady asked me to read Greg Deuble’s book *They Never Told Me This in Church!* In fact the lady who lent me the book was concerned it was heretical and she had asked for my opinion. Far from finding Deuble’s book heretical, I was convinced that these principles were the truth I had never known! I was so excited. All of a sudden the Bible made sense to me. All my life I just couldn’t quite come to terms and grasp how if Jesus was also God that his sacrifice could suffice. Of course! The second Adam. It took a completely human person to be obedient as an acceptable sacrifice for all! I’ve since read your book *The Doctrine of the Trinity* a few times and I now have your New Testament translation which I have read from cover to cover and use daily in my devotions. Since I have had my eyes opened to the true translation of the Bible, my faith has grown exponentially and I feel that I am finally building on solid ground.” — *Australia*

Encyclopedia Britannica:

“Neither the word Trinity nor the explicit doctrine appears in the New Testament, nor did Jesus and his followers intend to contradict the Shema in the Hebrew Scriptures...The doctrine developed gradually over several centuries and through many controversies...By the end of the 4th century, under the leadership of Basil of Caesarea, Gregory of Nyssa, and Gregory of Nazianzus (the Cappadocian Fathers), the doctrine of the Trinity took substantially the form it has maintained ever since” (“Trinity,” *Encyclopedia Britannica*, Britannica.com).