

Focus on the Kingdom

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Salvation: Making Sense of Jesus' Gospel of the Kingdom

“The New Testament begins the announcement of the Kingdom in terms expressive of its being previously well-known...The preaching of the Kingdom, its simple announcement, without the least attempt to explain its meaning and nature, the very language in which it was conveyed to the Jews — all presupposed that it was a subject familiar to all. John the Baptist, Jesus and the Seventy all proclaimed the Kingdom in a way without definition or explanation that indicated that their hearers were acquainted with its meaning. In the opening pages of the New Testament, it is taken for granted that the Kingdom was something well known, already the object of faith and hope” (G.N.H. Peters, *The Theocratic Kingdom of our Lord and Savior*, Vol. 1, p. 181).

Churchgoers are often nonplussed when it is suggested that Jesus was the first *evangelist* (introduced by John the Baptist). Jesus, they think, was important only because he died for the sins of the world. Jesus was indeed the supreme evangelist, a bearer of God's Gospel of the Kingdom. Jesus came to save, and he worked as an evangelist for several years before his death. Matthew, Mark, Luke and John tell us this primary fact on page after page.

John the Baptist's and Jesus' Announcement of the Gospel about the Kingdom of God

Jesus spoke to Jews, and in his opening statement he did not intend to confuse them by using words in a way which they could not have understood! Jesus frequently appealed to the Old Testament as a divine revelation whose meaning he and his audience held in common. Moses, according to Jesus, had written about the Messiah. But if one were not prepared to believe what Moses wrote, it would be impossible to believe what Jesus said (John 5:46, 47). After the resurrection Jesus chided the disciples for their failure to grasp what the prophets had spoken (Luke 24:25-27). This means that what the prophets wrote was intelligible. There existed already clear evidence of the trustworthiness of the prophets' predictions. Micah had foretold the birthplace of the Messiah. Isaiah had

foreseen the Messiah's activity as a miracle worker and healer (Isa. 35:5, 6).

The meaning Jesus attached to the phrase Kingdom of God can only have been the meaning given to that phrase in the Old Testament. If another concept were intended by “Kingdom of God” some explanation would be required at the beginning of John the Baptist's ministry to avoid misunderstanding. The facts are that John and Jesus make their announcement of the Kingdom on the presumption that their audience knew what the Kingdom was. People reacted by coming to John and Jesus for baptism. They could not have done this in the absence of information about what the Kingdom was.

Jesus spoke to Israel, to whom the oracles of God had been entrusted (Rom. 3:1, 2). According to Paul Jesus came to confirm the promises made to the fathers (Rom. 15:8). The Kingdom was itself the subject of the divine promise as “the kingdom which God has *promised* to those who love him” (James 2:5). It is impossible therefore that Jesus could have opened his ministry in Galilee by announcing the Kingdom of God in any sense other than that which was intelligible to himself and his audience.

What was that sense? Though the phrase Kingdom of God does not appear exactly in that form in the Hebrew Bible, the idea is all-pervasive. John Bright declares that the whole Bible might rightly be called “the book about the coming Kingdom.”

A classic passage for defining the Kingdom of God is I Chronicles 28. King David addressed an assemblage of officials, declaring that God had chosen him to be King over Israel forever (I Chron. 28:4). Likewise God had selected Solomon to sit on the throne of *the Kingdom of the Lord* over Israel. Solomon was duly crowned king of the united kingdom of Israel. They “anointed him as ruler *for the Lord*” (I Chron. 29:22). This meant that “he sat on *the throne of the Lord* as king in the place of David his father; and he prospered and all Israel obeyed him.” Subsequently

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Abijah succeeded to the throne of Judah and when confronted with the opposing armies of Israel under Jeroboam, he reminded the latter that “the Lord God of Israel gave the rule over Israel to David *forever*, and to his sons, by a covenant of salt” (II Chron. 13:5). It would therefore be unwise for Jeroboam to “resist *the Kingdom of the Lord* in the hands of the sons of David” (II Chron. 13:8).

Plainly, the Kingdom of the Lord means the kingdom administered by the royal house of David. The Davidic covenant had named the Davidic throne as the Kingdom of God when Nathan had said to David, “I will settle him [David’s descendant] in my house and in *my Kingdom* forever and his throne shall be established forever” (I Chron. 17:14).

The Kingdom of God meant therefore the empire ruled by the dynasty of David over Israel in the promised land. Its capital was Jerusalem, and it functioned on behalf of God Himself and could therefore be called both God's Kingdom and David's Kingdom. It was about this Kingdom to come that the fully-trained Apostles inquired in Acts 1:6. The restoration of the Kingdom in Jerusalem is the heart of the Good News. It will mean world peace.

The political and territorial nature of the Kingdom is made clear in numbers of other significant passages in the Hebrew Bible. The prophet Obadiah describes the Kingdom of the Lord as a time when Israel rules over former enemies. The supremacy of Israel is restored when “deliverers ascend Mount Zion to judge the mountain of Esau and the Kingdom will be the Lord’s” (Obad. 21). Here the political and territorial character of the Kingdom of God is crystal clear. So it is in Daniel 2:44 where “the God of Heaven will set up a kingdom which will never be destroyed, and that kingdom will not be left for another people; it will crush and put an end to all these other [preceding] kingdoms and it will itself endure forever.” This empire is further described as a time when “the saints will possess the kingdom” and “all kingdoms and dominions will serve them” (Dan. 7:22, 27). The Kingdom in question will be on earth, “under the whole heaven” (Dan. 7:27).

Kingdom data appears in equally unambiguous terms in Isaiah 16:5: “A throne will be established in lovingkindness and a judge will sit on it in faithfulness in the tent of David.” Micah’s Messianic prediction foresees a time coming when “the Lord will reign over Israel in Mount Zion...Even the former dominion *will come*, the Kingdom of the daughter of Jerusalem” (Micah 4:7, 8). It is a well-known fact that the Targums (Jewish commentary) clarify these passages

with the paraphrase: “The kingdom of God will be revealed.” Jesus echoed this passage in Micah when he urged his followers to concentrate their prayers on the future: “Thy Kingdom *come*.” Zechariah forecasts that the Messiah will “speak peace to the nations and his dominion will be from sea to sea, and from the River [Euphrates] to the ends of the earth” (Zech. 9:10).

Two further passages are of prime importance for establishing the territorial and political nature of the Kingdom as well as its thoroughly spiritual dimension as a kingdom initiated by Yahweh himself. In Isaiah 40:5 “the glory of the Lord is to be revealed.” This will mean the evangelization of the cities of Zion when the Lord God “will come with might with his arm ruling for him” (v. 10). Once again the Targum recognizes in these events the revelation of the Kingdom of God. Zephaniah reports that following a period of severe judgment, and beyond the Day of the Lord, the King of Israel, the Lord, will be “in their midst.” Zion is comforted with the promise that the Lord will be present as a victorious warrior (Zeph. 3:17).

Finally in Isaiah 52:7 (a text which Paul had in mind when he talked about the Gospel, Rom. 10:15) there is a passage rich in Gospel and Kingdom terminology. The announcement is made to Zion that “Your God reigns,” resulting in the restoration of Zion and the comfort and redemption of Jerusalem (Isa. 52:8, 9; cp. Acts 1:6). The Kingdom thus established is viewed by “all the nations” (Isa. 52:10). Appropriately the Targum sees in these events the setting up of the Kingdom of God. The phrase “your God reigns” or more accurately “your God has assumed kingship” marks a definite new era of history on earth. There is nothing abstract about the Kingdom, nor is the eternal sovereignty of God the subject of these prophecies. It is instead a political event marking the intervention of the Deity to take control of the Kingdom by installing His ruler the Messiah as head of a theocracy in Jerusalem. The basis of the concept is found in the Davidic covenant which anticipates a member of the House of David presiding over the Kingdom in the promised land (cp. Ps. 96:10: “The Lord has assumed His kingship”).

In view of this mass of convergent evidence it must be clear that when Jesus announced the Kingdom of God, he did not need to tell his audience that there was going to be such a thing. It is surprising that commentaries have not made the political, territorial and national aspects of the Kingdom of God known to readers. Jesus was not talking into the air when he announced the near approach of the Kingdom of God. The Kingdom was something deeply embedded in the national consciousness of Israel and unambiguously

defined by the Hebrew text and Targums. What has severely hampered understanding of the nature of the kingdom of God — and thus of the Christian Gospel — is the well-worn theory that Jesus must have been speaking of a spiritual and *not a political and geographical kingdom*. A Jew might legitimately object that a kingdom managed by the anointed Messiah ruling in Jerusalem is utterly spiritual. It is *both spiritual and political*, both national and universal. The fallacy of so much commentary has been to set spiritual against political as though these are mutually exclusive ideas. However in Scripture this is not the case. A prophecy which spelled out the geographical place on earth at which the Messiah was to be born (Micah 5:2) was no less spiritual than the prophecy of his suffering for the sins of the world (Isa. 53). The prophecy which announced the conception of the Messiah from a virgin was equally spiritual, though related to a particular Israelite virgin living in a specific location.

It cannot be reasonably argued that Jesus' meant anything by Kingdom of God in Mark 1:14, 15 than his heritage had transmitted to him. Only on that basis can his opening gospel salvo have been intelligible. There is a mass of New Testament evidence to corroborate the local, geographical and political nature of the coming Kingdom. Two passages in Luke tie the Kingdom to geography. There was an occasion during the ministry of Jesus near Jerusalem that his audience thought that the Kingdom would appear immediately. They were obviously thinking of the Kingdom as having its capital in the holy land. *Jesus did not correct this expectation*. The parable he gave clarified the fact that the Kingdom would not come into existence immediately. There was to be an interval during which he as Messiah would be absent. During that time he would acquire his right to rule in the Kingdom. He would then return to rule in the promised Kingdom, dealing at that time with opponents who resisted his royal authority (see Luke 19:11ff.)

Luke reports also that Jesus expected that many would arrive from east, west, north and south and join the resurrected patriarchs in the Kingdom of God (Luke 13:28, 29). The picture would naturally suggest to the minds of those familiar with the Hebrew Bible the Messianic banquet described by Isaiah 25:6, 7. The banquet was to take place "on this mountain," that is in Jerusalem.

The critical importance of this material lies in the fact that intelligent reception of the Gospel of the Kingdom is the essential step in Christian repentance

and conversion. Christians are those who have grasped the promise of the Kingdom by receiving the Kingdom Gospel as humble "children" (Luke 18:17; Mark 4:11, 12). In addition, the atoning death of Jesus, offered as a substitute for sinners, is the object of Christian faith. But the cross removed from its essential Kingdom background presents a partial and distorted Gospel.

"The content of Jesus' preaching is reported by Matthew in exactly the same words that were used in connection with John the Baptist (3:2; 4:17, 23). Jesus aligned himself completely with John. Like him he proclaimed [as Gospel] the coming of the Kingdom, the imminence of the great Day of the Lord, which meant judgment for the wicked and salvation for those who served God. The coming of the Kingdom is nothing less than God's final, decisive intervention into world history. Jesus therefore only said the Kingdom was *near*. With his appearance the end of the age had indeed drawn near, but it had not yet arrived. The nearness of the Kingdom was not merely Jesus' distinctive message at the beginning of his ministry; it remained the content of his message until the very end (see Matt. 10:7; Luke 22:18). Just like John he always pointed towards the future...He, like John, placed all emphasis on the Kingdom's imminence and on the urgent need to repent, before final judgment arrived" (*Matthew*, H.N. Ridderbos, pp. 75, 76). ✧

Do Evangelicals Preach the Gospel?

The purpose of Jesus:

"I came to call sinners to repentance" (Lk. 5:32)

"I came to save that which was lost" (Lk. 19:10)

"I came to undo the work of the devil"(1 Jn. 3:8)

But how?

"I came to preach the Gospel about the Kingdom of God" (Luke 4:43).

A popular form of evangelism tells us that Jesus appealed to the public to "ask him into their hearts." This language apparently has no basis in the recorded words of Jesus. It gives free rein to the human imagination. It does not seem to reflect Jesus' evangelistic method. How then did Jesus invite sinners to become believers?

The answer to this question was the primary concern of the Bible writers. After all, they were also evangelists, hoping with their written records to win others to salvation. What was their message and method?

Undoubtedly it was the message and method learned from Jesus' own example of preaching the Gospel. Today, however, many seem puzzled by the idea that Jesus was a Gospel-preacher. Did he not just die and rise from the dead? Was that not sufficient

basis for salvation? The answer must be a clear-cut “no.” If the death and resurrection of Jesus are all there is to the Gospel, why did Jesus preach *the Gospel* for some three years *without at that stage presenting any information about his death and resurrection*? How were the apostles able to go out under Jesus’ supervision and *preach the Gospel and offer salvation*, when the death and resurrection of Jesus were as yet unknown to them? (See Luke 18:31-34)

The facts are very simple. Jesus came to save the lost. He came to call sinners to repentance. How he went about this central task, however, seems largely to escape the notice of churchgoers. The plain answer is that Jesus presented a Message and invited people to believe that Message. Here are his opening words, and they are typical of his whole ministry.

Everything Jesus said is really an expansion of this opening statement about how salvation is to be gained: “Repent and *believe the Gospel-Message about the Kingdom of God*” (Mark 1:14, 15). This is a summary statement of the Christian faith provided by Mark at the outset of his evangelistic account of Jesus and his career as evangelist and Savior.

Jesus was the original evangelist: “Salvation was first proclaimed by the Lord [Jesus]” (Heb. 2:3).

How could we have missed the basis of the Christian faith as Jesus preached it? The answer is that we have been bombarded with language about sin and forgiveness and the blood of Jesus (also essential elements of the Gospel), but we have apparently been steered away from the obvious fact (once one sees it) that such *forgiveness is secured also on the basis of responding intelligently to Jesus’ Gospel about the Kingdom*.

Jesus’ teaching is straightforward on this point. He compared his saving Gospel teaching to a seed sown in the heart. The seed is called the Gospel/Word about the Kingdom (Matt. 13:19) — abbreviated sometimes to simply “the word” (Luke 8:11). That seed/Message he commands us to understand, believe and embrace. It must be accepted by our minds and become the mainspring of our lives. According to Jesus, repentance means abandoning our own philosophy of life and becoming devoted to his Gospel of the Kingdom: By turning away from our own agendas we are to embrace his agenda — what he constantly called the Kingdom of God Gospel. (Many churchgoers today are heavily committed to current political programs, but Jesus was very little concerned with social action. He was interested in the ultimate question of God’s politics. The Kingdoms of this

present world are by definition not Christian. They are part of Satan’s world. Christians do not belong to this system; they are “not of this world.”)

Jesus complained that many are reluctant to repent *on his terms*. They prefer their own terms. They may well be disposed to give up whatever they have conceived as sinful and ungodly, but the issue for Jesus is their response not to a vague ungodliness but to his saving appeal: *belief in the Gospel of the Kingdom*. Jesus laid out this central fact about salvation in Mark 4:11, 12. He explained that it was failure to embrace *his Gospel/word about the Kingdom* which prevented people from coming to him and being saved. “To you [Christian disciples] the mystery of the Kingdom of God has been given or made known [Matt. 13:11], but to the others the Message comes in parables: they see and do not perceive and they hear and do not understand. If they did they would repent and be forgiven” (Mark 4:11, 12). The issue in regard to repentance is very obviously here the *reception or non-reception of Jesus’ Gospel of the Kingdom*. Luke reports the same truth with equal clarity. “When anyone hears the Gospel/word [about the Kingdom, Matt. 13:19] and does not understand it, the Devil comes and snatches away the Gospel which has been sown in his heart [mind] so that he cannot *believe it and be saved*” (Luke 8:12). Here evidently repentance and forgiveness are *conditional upon* the intelligent acceptance of the preaching of the Kingdom of God by Jesus.

Yet, in current evangelism, no such information about the Kingdom of God is offered to the potential convert. Rather he is told to “acknowledge his sin” and “accept Jesus” who died for him. But this method skips over the essential step on which Jesus laid so much emphasis. On the evidence of the words of Jesus above, is forgiveness offered apart from repentance and acceptance of the Gospel of the Kingdom?

Luke in Acts 8:12 presents a very clear “formula” for becoming members of the body of Christ. Once again, following Jesus’ own evangelistic model, the issue is the acceptance or refusal of the Gospel about the Kingdom. “When they believed Philip as he preached the Gospel about the Kingdom of God, they were getting baptized, both men and women” (Acts 8:12).

Surprisingly this is not the way modern evangelicals see salvation. In their minds the death and resurrection of Jesus has swallowed up any necessity to heed the actual words of Jesus when he preached salvation. A remedy for this puzzling situation would be to insist on preaching the Gospel from the gospels

themselves, *starting* with the words of Jesus in Matthew, Mark, Luke and John. These four corroborating accounts make it impossible to avoid the simple fact that the primary and fundamental element in the Gospel is the acceptance of Jesus by accepting his Gospel of the Kingdom. “If you do not believe Moses, how can you believe my words?” “He who *hears my Message/Gospel* and believes him who sent me has eternal life” (John 5:24). The following sayings of Jesus are most pertinent to our subject and should, we think, call for a revolution in what is presented to the public for salvation:

“Whoever does not receive the Kingdom of God like a child will not enter it” (Luke 18:17) (cp. John 17:8, “receive my words”).

“Unless you are converted and become like children you will not enter the KG” (Matt. 18:3).

“Unless a person is born again, he cannot see/enter the KG” (John 3:3-5).

Combining Jesus’ various statements we have this:

Unless you hear and understand the KG you cannot repent and be forgiven.

Unless you are converted, become like children, get born again and receive the KG, you won’t enter it, be saved (Mark 4:11, 12, 14; John 3:3, 5; Luke 8:12; Matt. 13:19.)

When his audience had refused Paul’s solemn, dawn till dusk exercise in persuasion and testimony *about the Kingdom of God* from the Bible, “some were not persuaded, would not believe; some believed” (Acts 28:24). So then, being persuaded about the Kingdom means believing, becoming a Christian.

“If they did not close their minds, if they heard and saw and understood with their hearts they would repent and be healed” (Mark 4:12).

Salvation in the words of Jesus is always dependent on an intelligent understanding and reception by the mind of the truth about the Kingdom of God.

Hence: “He who **hears my word** [about the Kingdom of God] and believes Him who sent me has eternal life” (John 5:24). Salvation is dependent on hearing, understanding and obeying the words of Jesus. Faith means believing what Jesus and the Apostles say and acting on those words. Thus Paul concludes, as a career preacher of the Gospel of the Kingdom (Acts 20:25): “Faith originates in hearing and hearing by means of Christ’s Message” (Rom. 10:17). But the missing link in the chain of salvation, as popularly presented, seems to be a disregard for what *Jesus proclaimed as the Gospel*. ✧

Christians and Heaven

“*Heaven in the Bible is nowhere the destination of the dying.*” — Cambridge biblical scholar J.A.T. Robinson

“*No Bible text authorizes the statement that the soul is separated from the body at death.*” — The celebrated *Interpreter’s Dictionary of the Bible* (Vol. 1, p. 803)

Why do we Christians talk such nonsense about our Christian destiny? On every hand we hear talk of “going to heaven when you die,” “gaining kingdoms in the sky,” and “passing away,” “passing on” or “going home” at death. With all this familiar language we comfort ourselves with the belief that the dead have departed to be with God, in conscious bliss, in His supercelestial realm. We hope to survive death and join them there.

Pause a moment and ask yourself reflectively: Where does all this “departure to heaven at death” language come from? Certainly not from the Bible. What, for example, did the heroic prophet Daniel expect at death? The angel told him: “Go your way to the end of your life; then you will *enter into rest* and rise again for your allotted portion at the end of the age” (Dan. 12:13).

Death for Daniel was to be a rest in the dust of the ground (see Dan. 12:2, where the same divine messenger described the condition of the dead as “sleeping in the earth”) followed by a rising, that is, resurrection “at the end of the age.” There is no word here about Daniel’s soul going to heaven to be conscious in heavenly bliss. Instead Daniel was to repose in death and eventually, *at the end of the age*, to arise to new life. But for what purpose? “You shall rise again for your allotted portion” (Dan. 12:13). So the angel described the hope of the faithful. What, then, was Daniel to expect?

The standard Lexicon of the Hebrew Bible¹ tells us that the “allotted portion” expected by Daniel was “a share in the Messianic consummation,” the glories of which had been extolled by all the Hebrew prophets. The Messiah’s kingdom was indeed to be set up upon the earth, “under the whole heaven,” in the words of a vision granted earlier to Daniel (7:27). The promise was that “the sovereignty, the dominion and the greatness of all the kingdoms under the whole heaven [would be] given to the people of the saints of the

¹ *Hebrew and English Lexicon of the Old Testament*, Brown, Driver and Briggs, Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1968, p. 174.

Highest One” (Dan. 7:27). Those faithful would then rule supreme in the renewed earth in company with the Messiah.

Inheriting the Earth

From Jewish literature, both biblical and extra-biblical, we see how this passionate hope for a part in the Messianic Kingdom on earth burned within the hearts of God’s people. The glory of the Messiah’s coming rule, in which the Saints were promised a share, sustained the persecuted believers when affliction was most intense.

Exactly the same destiny is promised the faithful of the New Testament times: “[Jesus] has made them [the faithful] kings and priests and they shall reign upon the earth” (Rev. 5:10).

For centuries churches have been busy dismantling the biblical hope and replacing it with the vaguest prospect of disembodied life (can anyone even imagine life without a body?) in heaven, removed from man’s home on earth. Nothing would have seemed more nonsensical to the writers of the Bible. Nothing is more destructive to God’s grand design for our planet. The earth had been given to man as his everlasting dwelling. “Inheriting the earth” was the longing of every faithful Israelite and it was expressly confirmed by Jesus in his famous beatitude (Matt. 5:5): “Blessed are the humble for they are going to inherit the earth.” He takes up the refrain of Psalm 37 (vv. 3, 11, 22, 27, 29, 34) when he promises the gentle that “they shall inherit the earth,” that is, attain to the Messianic salvation which Daniel had treasured. What’s more, the Psalmist had promised not only that the faithful would “inherit the earth” but that they would “dwell in it forever” (Ps. 37:29).

But churches have thrown away these precious promises. As if to reinforce a long-standing tradition of uncomprehending treatment of the Scriptures by Gentiles, the *Good News Bible* loses the point of Jesus’ cheering hope for the future. It renders Matthew 5:5 in such a way as to have the gentle “inherit what God has promised.” Is this a sop to its audience who would supposedly make little of the promise of inheriting the earth, since all it knew was the cherished tradition about going to heaven? There is no reason to hide plain statements under a fog.

The Bible knows only of the Messianic salvation foreseen by the prophets, which Jesus came not to destroy (Matt. 5:17). To dwell in “the land of the promise” was the aim of the holy people of Israel since that oath-bound, covenanted promise had been given to Abraham. Jesus confirmed these grand

promises (Rom. 15:8), spurring the disciples on to their glorious destiny and assignment with Daniel in Messiah’s Kingdom at the end of the age (Dan. 12:13).

How much better it would be if Christians abandoned the non-biblical language about going to heaven and replaced it with Jesus’ words about inheriting the earth (Matt. 5:5), coming from the east, the west, the north and the south and reclining with Abraham, Isaac and Jacob in the Kingdom of the coming age, taking their places at the great Feast in Jerusalem (Matt. 8:11; Luke 13:28, 29, based on Isa. 25:6).

The Bible is a book which deals in reality, offering a realistic hope that Christians will rule the earth with Christ when he returns. The angels celebrate this sparkling prospect for redeemed humanity: “You [Jesus] purchased men for God from every tribe and language and people and nation. You have made them to be a kingdom and priests [cp. Ex. 19:5, 6] to serve our God, and they will reign on the earth” (Rev. 5:9-10).

Throughout the New Testament Christians are described as heirs of a great future inheritance — the Kingdom of God. The Kingdom of God is a matter of promise and expectation, an inheritance to be taken up in the future. James (2:5) says: “Listen, my brothers, has not God chosen those who are poor in the eyes of the world to be rich in faith and to inherit the Kingdom which He has promised to those who love Him?”

“We are heirs of God and co-heirs with Messiah” (Rom. 8:17), “heirs according to the promise” (i.e., of the Kingdom, James 2:5, above) (Gal. 3:29). The Gentiles can be “heirs together with Israel...and sharers together in the promise (of the Kingdom, James 2:5) in Christ Jesus” (Eph. 3:6). And the promise to Abraham is unmistakable. He was to be “heir of the world” (Rom 4:13).

At the present time, and upon baptism into the Messiah, the Spirit of God is given us as pledge or down payment of our future inheritance. In the excellent language of the NIV, the spirit is “the deposit guaranteeing our inheritance” (Eph. 1:14). Obviously, then, we have not yet entered the Kingdom of God. Indeed we cannot inherit it apart from a future resurrection (I Cor. 15:50). The spirit is the pledge of a *future* inheritance — of the Kingdom which is promised us, but not yet ours.

Two fundamental distortions of the Bible, learned unfortunately in church, cast a shadow over our attempts to read the Bible intelligently. Firstly we seem to imagine that we have already inherited the Kingdom of God. This sort of thinking detracts from the glory of

the future and disintegrates the great hope on which love and faith are built (Col. 1:5). Emphatically Paul states that “flesh and blood [humans in their present bodies] *cannot* inherit the Kingdom of God” (I Cor. 15:50) and that the “reward of the inheritance” lies in the future (Col. 3:24). Secondly, we speak of achieving glory at the moment of our death, when the New Testament everywhere teaches us to wait until the *Coming of Jesus*. The traditional “heaven at death” teaching diminishes, if not reduces to nothing, the New Testament excitement about the return of Jesus to resurrect and reward the faithful — then and not before: “For 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).

When next you hear talk about so and so having “gone to heaven to be with Jesus,” please gently remind the speaker that belief in disembodied souls going to heaven is the common property of pagan religions, and should be banished from Christian circles. A tremendous revolution in our thinking and speaking is long overdue. ✧

A Useful Definition of the Holy Spirit

“The Spirit is not merely God’s breath, but his self-awareness, his mind, his inner being. This may be the source or seat of God’s vitality, but it is more. It is his self-consciousness, his very being, the center of his Person, as we might say. Just as a man’s spirit is his ultimate reality, when he is stripped of all that is accidental to his being, so God’s Spirit is his inner self. Spirit therefore contrasts with Christ, insofar as the latter is God’s image, while the former is his inner being” (W.R. Bowie).

Comment: “I have found the message of your program spiritually uplifting. I started listening 2 weeks ago on Radio Africa, and never wanted to miss it since then. In a troubled and hopeless world you bring lasting hope.” — *Zimbabwe*

Atlanta Bible College’s Tenth Annual Theological Conference — February 16th-18th, 2001

We invite all of our readers to visit us for a unique experience. Beginning on the afternoon of Friday, Feb. 16th and ending at lunchtime on Sunday, Feb. 18th we will convene a gathering of like-minded Bible students and inquirers of all sorts (all are welcome). We have invited as guest speaker Professor Clayton Sullivan of the University of Southern Mississippi, author of a remarkable book, *Rethinking Realized Eschatology*, Mercer University Press, 1988. None should be daunted by the technical language — the issues are well known to students of the Bible. The professor’s objective in writing was to examine Jesus’ central and favorite topic: the Kingdom of God. Professor Sullivan exposes and unravels the immensely popular notion (promoted by well-known scholar C.H. Dodd) that the Kingdom of God in the gospels was actualized and exclusively present in the ministry of Jesus. Dodd had left no room for the understanding of the Kingdom as the future, decisive event by which God will establish through the Messiah peace on earth, when Jesus returns. Sullivan writes provocatively: “Throughout most of this two millennia span, the Church has paid scant attention to Jesus the Jew...Instead primary attention was given to doctrines and dogmas about Jesus.”

Professor Sullivan’s expert knowledge of this most crucial of Christian issues will sharpen your understanding of what has been going on by way of an eclipse of Jesus’ own Gospel. You will be empowered by this information to speak with greater confidence about the Kingdom of God, Jesus’ “magnificent obsession.” Professor Sullivan will present two lectures (with opportunity for questions following).

The remainder of our weekend will consist of presentations (with time for audience participation) by various speakers on central Christian topics. There will be space also for short “journey of faith” presentations by our visitors. We look forward to becoming acquainted with those whom we have met only through radio contact. We expect visitors from abroad. The meetings and socializing provide a rare opportunity to meet other “truth-seekers.”

We will be advertising block rates at a local hotel, and transportation will be provided free from Hartsfield International Airport as well as from the hotel, to Atlanta Bible College. If you have questions about the conference, please email us at anthonybuzzard@mindspring.com or phone us at Atlanta Bible College (800-347-4261). A registration form is provided here.

Cost	Regular Rate	Full-time Student
Early Bird (by Jan 20 th)	\$29	\$19
After Jan. 20th	\$39	\$29

2001 Theological Conference

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