

LIVING WATERS NEWSLETTER

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WHO TOOK THE KINGDOM OUT OF THE GOSPEL?

It is common today to hear preachers refer to the second chapter of Acts and say that Peter preached the first gospel sermon. This belief is based upon the words of Paul in I Corinthians 15:1-4 when he reminded them of “the gospel which I preached to you.” He goes on to say he had preached to them the fact that “Christ died for our sins, according to the Scriptures, and that he was buried, and that he was raised on the third day” (ver.3,4). Upon the bases of these verses we have concluded that the gospel is the good news that Christ died, was buried and rose again. This is indeed “good news” but is by no means all of “The Gospel”. In fact the gospel was preached before these events took place. Mark 1:14, 15 states “Jesus came into Galilee preaching the gospel of God and saying, ‘The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God is at hand, repent and believe in the Gospel.’” The word gospel means “good news”. So what was the good news Jesus preached? Salvation from sin? God’s love for mankind? That he would die for the sins of the world? These and other important subjects Jesus certainly taught, but they were not the main thrust of his preaching. Matthew states it this way: “And Jesus was going about in all Galilee, teaching in their synagogues, and proclaiming the gospel of the Kingdom” (Matt. 4:23). Further: “Jesus was going about in all the cities and villages, teaching in their synagogues, and proclaiming the gospel of the Kingdom” (Matt. 9:35). In fact Jesus says the reason he was sent was to preach the kingdom: “I must preach the kingdom of God to other cities also, because for this reason I have been sent” (Luke 4:43). It may surprise us to know Jesus was not the first to preach the gospel. “And the Scripture, foreseeing that God would justify the Gentiles by faith, preached the gospel beforehand to Abraham saying, ‘All the nations shall be blessed in you’” (Gal. 3:8). Further in speaking of Israel in the wilderness the Hebrew writer says: “For indeed we have had the gospel preached to us, just as they also; but the word they heard did not profit them, because it was not united by faith in those who heard” (Heb. 4:2).

But didn’t Paul say that the death, burial and resurrection of Jesus was the gospel he preached to them and that “I delivered to you as of first importance what I also received”? (I Cor. 15:1-3). The literal translation of verse three is: “For I delivered to you *among the first things* what also I received...” As crucial and integral as the death, burial and resurrection of Christ are to the Gospel, they are not the whole Gospel. These truths are *among* others that Paul proclaimed. If the first message of Jesus was the kingdom of God then Paul’s message must have contained this truth. The book of Acts verifies this: Paul “...continued speaking out boldly for three months, reasoning and persuading them about the kingdom of God” (Acts 19:8). On his way to Jerusalem Paul told the elders at Ephesus: “I do not consider my life of any account as dear to myself, in order that I may finish my course, and the ministry which I received from the Lord Jesus, to testify solemnly of the gospel of the grace of God. And now I know that you all, among whom I went about preaching the kingdom, will see my face no more...for I did not shrink from declaring to you the whole purpose of God” (Acts 20:24-27). These verses show that “the gospel of the grace of

God” and the “preaching of the kingdom” were the same thing and are summed up in verse 27 as being “the whole purpose of God.” When imprisoned in Rome Paul “testified about the kingdom of God” and “preached the kingdom of God” (Acts 28:23,31). The Jews did not accept his message so he said, “Let it be known to you therefore, that this salvation of God has been sent to the Gentiles” (ver. 28). This equates “this salvation of God” with “the Gospel of the Kingdom”. A quote from a Billy Graham Gospel tract written by Roy Gustafson entitled *What is the Gospel?* states the common views about Paul’s preaching: “If you will read the epistles of Paul you will notice the message centers in three things: the death, the burial, and the resurrection of Christ. As far as Paul was concerned, Christ Jesus came to do three days’ work: the work was commenced when he was nailed on the cross and was ended when God raised him from among the dead. Paul never discussed the earthly life of our lord—his baptism, his temptation, his miracles, his teachings, or even his sufferings in the Garden of Gethsemane. This is quite in keeping with the rest of the New Testament, for we must remember that Christ came not primarily to preach the gospel (though he did herald deliverance to the prisoner), but he came rather that there might be a gospel to preach. This gospel was won and brought into being by his work on the cross.” If this tract is true then the Scriptures that declare Christ preached “the gospel of the Kingdom” are false. Charles Taber, Professor Emeritus of World Mission, Emanuel School of Evangelism, Johnson City, Tenn. Is quoted in *Focus on the Kingdom* as saying: “I read with the greatest interest the nine statements attempting to answer the question, ‘What is the Gospel?’ I am amazed and dismayed to find not even a passing mention of the theme which was the core of Jesus’ Gospel in three of the four accounts: the Kingdom of God. Every one of these statements reflects the individualistic reduction of the gospel that plagues American evangelicalism.” Peter Wagner, the father of the modern church growth movement, in his book *Church Growth and the Whole Gospel* wrote: “I honestly cannot remember any pastor whose ministry I have been under actually preaching a sermon on the Kingdom of God...I now realize I have never preached a sermon on it. Where has the Kingdom been?”

Jesus announced that “the Kingdom of God is at hand; repent and believe the Gospel” (Mark 1:14, 15). “At hand” means “it is near”. Jesus also said “Upon this rock (the confession of Peter that he was the Christ the son of the living God) I will build my church...I will give to you the keys of the kingdom of heaven...” (Matt. 16:18, 19). Upon the basis of these statements many have pointed to Pentecost as the beginning of the church, and therefore the beginning of the Kingdom, equating the kingdom with the church. However the meaning of the word “church” and “Kingdom” show they were not the same thing. The word for church is the word *ekklesia* a combination of two words: “ek” (out of) and “klesis” (a calling) meaning “called out”. The word is used in Acts 19:32,39,41 to describe the citizens of Ephesus gathered together and is translated “assembly”. Stephen uses the word to describe Israel in the wilderness (Acts 7:38). It is used by Jesus in Mathew 18:17 when he refers to a sinning brother and says if he refuses to listen to witnesses they were “to tell it to

the church, and if he refuses to listen to the church, let him be to you as a Gentile..." The word "kingdom" is *basileia* and means "reign" "rule" (II Tim. 2:12). It is never translated "assembly". The word "kingdom" is used over 106 times in the Old Testament and besides being translated "kingdom" it is translated "dominion" "rule" and "sovereignty". In reference to Israel the nation was called to be God's "kingdom of priest and a holy nation" (Ex. 19:6). They failed to live up to this calling and rejected God as their King (I Sam. 8:7). God did not give up on them until they rejected Christ as the cornerstone: "Therefore I say unto you, the kingdom of God will be taken away from you, and be given to a nation producing the fruit of it" (Matt. 21:23). This "nation" is the people of God described in I Peter 2:4-9.

The Kingdom is not limited to being the church. "For the kingdom is Jehovah's and He rules over the nations" (Psalm 22:25) and "...the Most High is ruler over the realm of mankind, and bestows it on whomsoever He wishes" (Dan. 25:34), and "His kingdom is an everlasting kingdom" (Dan. 4:3). It is only in the context of the Kingdom that the church has meaning. It is God's purpose to qualify His people "to share in the inheritance of the saints of light, for He has delivered us from the dominion (kingdom) of darkness, and transferred us into the kingdom of his beloved Son in whom we have redemption, the forgiveness of sins" (Col. 1:12, 13). (It is interesting to note that the word "into" in this passage is the same word in Acts 2:38 translated "for" the remission of sins. Thus, we are transferred "for the kingdom"). The ultimate purpose, then, of the church is to bring people into the kingdom of God and under the reign of God which is manifested in the life and teachings of His Son. When Jesus told Peter upon this rock I will build my church" (Matt. 16:18 he went on to say "I will give you the keys of the kingdom of heaven" (ver.19). It seems building the church was not an end in itself but a means of his people inheriting the kingdom prepared "from the foundation of the world" (Matt. 25:34) "for your Father has chosen gladly to give you the kingdom" (Luke 12:32). Jesus "builds" his church, and the Father "gives" us the kingdom. Jesus in his ministry demonstrated what the kingdom of God is: "Now having been questioned by the Pharisees as to when the kingdom of God was coming, he answered them and said, 'the kingdom of God is not coming with signs to be observed; nor will they say 'look here it is' or 'there it is' for behold, the kingdom of God is in your midst'" (Luke 17:10, 21). Wherever Jesus was, there was the kingdom. He further stated: "But if I cast out demons by the finger of God, then the kingdom of God has come upon you" (Luke 11:20). When we pray "Thy kingdom come" we are asking God to manifest Himself through us. When God began to manifest himself in Christ He was beginning to fulfill the prophecy of Daniel when he interpreted the dream of Nebuchadnezzar as being four kingdoms: Babylon, Media-Persia, Greece and Rome (the first three are mentioned by name in chapter 8 and we know Rome followed Greece), and stated "And in the days of these kings the God of heaven will set up a kingdom which will never be destroyed, and the kingdom will not be left for another people; it will crush and put an end to all these kingdoms, but it will endure forever" (Dan. 2:44). The kingdom began with Christ, was confirmed by his resurrection and ascension (Eph. 2:20-23) and will continue until "when he delivers up the kingdom to the God and Father; when he has abolished all rule and all authority and power. For he must reign until he has put all his enemies under his feet" (I Cor. 15:24, 25).

Abolishing "all authority and power" is referring to the authorities and powers in the earth. This says there is a future reign of Christ upon the earth when he returns and "the kingdoms of this world (will become) the kingdom of our Lord and His Christ and he will reign forever and ever" (Rev. 11:15). There is a popular hymn that says "we shall reign with him on high." This is an illustration of false doctrine being taught by our hymns. The Scriptures teach the opposite: "...thou didst purchase for God with thy blood men from every tribe and tongue and people and nation. And thou hast made them to be a kingdom and priests to our God; and they will reign upon the earth" (Rev. 5:9, 10). This is portrayed symbolically in Revelation 20:6 in the words: "and they came to life (those who have part in the first resurrection, Christ's), and will reign with him for a thousand years" (Rev. 20:4, 5). Prophecy preachers have taken these passages literally and developed all kinds of unscriptural theories concerning "the Millennial Reign" failing to see the word "thousand" is used symbolically to refer to a vast number (Psalm 50:10; 68:17; Dan. 7:10). The apostle Paul states: "if we endure we shall also reign with him" (II Tim. 2:12).

The religious world has been so absorbed with walking the streets of gold with Christ in heaven, they have never considered ruling with him on earth. Consider the following scriptures and keep in mind Romans 8:17 which states that we are "heirs of God and joint heirs of Christ". A joint heir shares everything the heir inherits. If Christ rules the nations of the earth, then we will rule the earth with him. "He who overcomes and he who keeps my deeds until the end, to him I will give authority over the nations; and he shall rule them with a rod of iron, as the vessels of the potter are broken to pieces, as I also have received authority from my Father" (Rev. 2:26, 27). This is a quotation from Psalm 2:8, 9 and 10 in a prophecy of the son of God: "Ask of Me and I will surely give the nations as thy inheritance, and the very ends of the earth as thy possession. Thou shall break them with a rod of iron, thou shall shatter them like earthenware. Therefore, O kings, show discernment..." No wonder John wrote "the kingdoms of this world have become the kingdom of our Lord and His Christ. In Luke 19:17, 19 Jesus declared: "'well done good slave, because you have been faithful in a very little thing, be in authority over ten cities...' and he said to (another one) also, 'you are to be over five cities.'" In a prophecy concerning the coming kingdom of the Son of Man, after stating he would be given dominion and glory and a kingdom it goes further and says: "the saints of the Highest One will receive the kingdom, and possess the kingdom forever, for all ages to come...the sovereignty, the dominion, and the greatness of all the kingdoms under the whole heaven will be given to the people of the saints of the Highest One; His kingdom will be an everlasting kingdom, and all the dominions will serve and obey Him" (Dan. 7:18, 27).

The gospel is more than a message telling us how to get to heaven, rather it is a message concerning the kingdom of God and the part we will play in it. Paul asked the Corinthians: "Do you not know that the saints will judge the world?" and "Do you not know that we shall judge angels?" The word "judge" when seen in the light of the book of Judges means "to rule" (that's what the judges did when they judged Israel). Not only did the Corinthians not know this, the church today does not know it. Most preachers would pass it off as "making no difference to us" because the kingdom has been taken out of the gospel.