

WHAT WAS THE MESSAGE OF JESUS?

Whereas the Kingdom of God was the dominant topic of all preaching in the New Testament, it has been practically disregarded by today's modern church. This lack of the Kingdom-centered gospel is having destructive results on God's people and has now reached a crucial stage. A "repeat this prayer after me" theology that focuses only on Christ benefits has replaced the need to call upon His Name with the whole heart (Rom. 10:13). Jesus invitation was to follow Me (Luke 9:23), to receive His Person (John 6:53-54), which involved His Lordship (Luke 6:46), Savior hood (John 4:42), and Kingship (Luke 23:2-3; Acts 17:7). A modern day microwave theology, which has no commitment, has no repentance, forsakes no idols and turns from no sin, has provided a substitute for the God-centered

“gospel of the kingdom.” This incompleteness of understanding is so great that most teachers and professors of Bible colleges would experience great difficulty and distress if ask to state the precise meaning of the “gospel of the kingdom of God” (Matthew 24:14; Mark 1:14-15; Acts 8:12; Acts 28:30-31). The result is a message reduced in strength and effectiveness. It serves no Master, and has no power to change and transform lives.

THE FOUNDATION FOR PREACHING THE GOSPEL OF THE KINGDOM

When John the Baptist came preaching, “Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand!” (Matthew 3:2), his listeners understood he was directing their attention to the end of this age predicted by the Old Testament prophets, a time when God would send the promised

messianic king to defeat Israel's enemies and usher in a new age of universal peace. John called people to repent as a requirement to enter the Kingdom and escape the coming judgment (Matthew 3:1-2, 5-8).

After John's arrest, "Jesus came into Galilee, preaching the gospel of the kingdom of God, and saying, 'The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God is at hand: repent ye, and believe the gospel.'" (Mark 1:14-15). Luke tells us that when Jesus stood in the synagogue and read a messianic passage from the prophet Isaiah, he concluded by saying, "This day is this scripture fulfilled in your hears" (Luke 4:21). Later, when asked if he were the promised Messiah, the Christ, the Son of the Blessed, Jesus replied, "I am" (Mark 14:61-62). The waiting period was over. The Kingdom had arrived in the person of Jesus. It was no longer

an awaited hope, but it now had a name and a face connected with it.

Soon after his synagogue discourse, Jesus told the crowds, “I must tell the good news of the kingdom of God to other towns as well – that is my mission.” And he continued proclaiming his message in the synagogues of Judea. (Luke 4:43-44). After this, Jesus traveled about from one town and village to another, proclaiming the good news of the kingdom of God. The Twelve were with Him (Luke 8:1).

Is it any wonder as He sent them out, He commissioned them “to preach the kingdom of God, and to heal the sick” (Luke 9:1-2)? Mark’s parallel account of the event says, “And they went out, and preached that men should repent” (Mark 6:12), showing the link of coming under God’s rule (Kingdom) and the call to

repentance. Jesus then appointed 70 others and sent them in pairs to heal the sick and say, “The Kingdom of God is near you now” (Luke 10:1, 9).

Prior to His ascension, the resurrected Lord Jesus Christ spent 40 days with the apostles “speaking of the things pertaining to the kingdom of God” (Acts 1:3). Thus, He ended His earthly ministry the way He began it – by declaring the Gospel of the Kingdom of God!

On the mount, after assuring His followers that there would be a future dimension to the Kingdom (Acts 1:6-7), He told them that in the interim they were to be His witnesses (Acts 1:8). Therefore, it is not surprising to find the Apostles and the early church preaching “the things concerning the kingdom of God and the name of Jesus Christ” (Acts 8:12). The Apostle

Paul, likewise, taught “the things concerning the kingdom of God” (Acts 19:8). He reminded the elders at Ephesus of his “preaching the kingdom of God” (Acts 20:25,31). While under house arrest in Rome, “Many came to him at his lodging, to whom he explained and solemnly testified of the kingdom of God” (Acts 28:23). The Book of Acts closes, significantly, with these words, “Then Paul dwelt two whole years in his own rented house and received all who came to him, preaching the kingdom of God and teaching the things which concern the Lord Jesus Christ with all confidence, no one forbidding him” (Acts 28:30-31).

There can be no doubt that the Gospel of the Kingdom was the central theme of first-century preaching. Consequently, it should be our commission as well.

THE ESSENTIALS OF THE KINGDOM MESSAGE

The Gospel is not an invitation to “invite Christ into your heart,” although His Spirit indwells every believer. Neither does the Gospel center on heaven, although every follower of Christ will depart to be with the Lord. Few, if any, New Testament sermons deal with heaven. Rather they focus on the Kingdom and what it means now and in the future.

The New Testament word for ‘kingdom’ *basileia* announces a King and those that are invited to receive His reign. God foretold a time when He would send a mighty deliverer to establish a new covenant and bring all things in subjection to Himself. All independent kingdoms to which people give their allegiance, both spiritual and material, will be destroyed.

The Saviour (Jesus) embodied in human form announced that God's Kingdom had arrived, and then He called people to submit to His rule. On the cross He defeated Satan, offered His life as an atonement for sin, and regained dominion over God's creation which Adam had relinquished at the fall.

Calvary was God's death blow to Satan's rule, sin's power and death's victory and for this reason, it became the ultimate "hope for a lost humanity."

At His resurrection, Christ emerged from the cosmic battle victorious, proving that God, not the rebels, was in charge. After all, if Jesus could enter the heart of enemy territory and not be defeated, then their days are numbered!

From His exalted position at God's right hand,

Christ now rules from His throne until His enemies become his footstool (Acts 2:35; 1 Corinthians 15:24-25). The powers of evil may still function in a limited way (Colossians 2:15; 1:15-16; 1 Corinthians 2:6-8), but as one theologian remarks, “All kingdoms are confronted with their rightful overlord.”

As King of Kings, and Lord of Lords, Christ now directs the course of history toward its victorious completion, that is, the future establishment of His Kingdom on earth and the judgment of all people, which will take place at the end of this age (2 Thess. 1:7-10).

The church is to spread the Gospel of the Kingdom to the entire world and summons humanity to submit to God’s rule. Whenever and wherever the victory of Christ is proclaimed and obeyed, Satan must retreat. As

God's rule expands, Satan's recedes.

When asked what would be the sign of His coming and the end of the age, Jesus replied, "And this gospel of the kingdom will be preached in all the world as a witness to all nations, and then the end will come" (Matthew 24:14).

It is essential that we as Southern Baptists re-examine the message we proclaim. Is it the same "gospel of the kingdom" preached by Jesus and the apostles?

The principles shared in this booklet were first shared by R. Alan Streett, chairman and professor at Criswell College in Dallas, Texas. Professor Streett is part of the Southern Baptist Convention and is asking his denomination to

reconsider their message and methods used in evangelism.

SOMETHING TO CONSIDER

The words “King” or “Kingdom” or its equivalent is used 3274 times in Scripture. 285 of those times it is used in the New Testament. The word “Christ” which means “anointed” generally to rule as a king (Luke 23:2) is used 571 times in the New Testament. The word “Lord” which is the Gentile way of expressing “kingship, one who is in authority, the boss” is used 728 times in the New Testament. The word “Saviour” meaning “deliverer” is used 24 times. The word “disciple” and “disciples” is used 272 times in the New Testament. The word “Christian” and “Christians” is used only 3 times in Scripture. The phrase “ask Jesus into your heart” is used 0 times. The phrase

“receive Jesus as your Saviour” is used 0 times. The example of having someone repeat a prayer after someone instead of calling upon God from the heart is found 0 times in Scripture. You may be so accustomed to hearing certain phrases that it may surprise you to learn that many of them are not based on Biblical terminology.

A FINAL WORD

Richard P. Belcher stated, “If one were to suggest that the time would come when a group of evangelical Christians would be arguing for a salvation without repentance, without a change of behavior or lifestyle, without a real avowal of the lordship and authority of Christ, without perseverance, without discipleship, and a salvation which does not necessarily result in obedience and

works, and with a regeneration which does not necessarily change one's life, most believers of several decades ago would have felt such would be an absolute impossibility. But believe it or not, the hour has come.”

DISCIPLESHIP QUESTIONS

1. What was the message that Jesus preached?

Answer: MT 4:[17] From that time Jesus began to preach, and to say, Repent: for the kingdom of heaven is at hand.

MT 4:[23] And Jesus went about all Galilee, teaching in their synagogues, and preaching the gospel of the kingdom, and healing all manner of sickness and all manner of disease among the people.

LK 4:[43] And he said unto them, I must preach the kingdom of God to other cities also: for therefore am I sent. **[44]** And he preached in the synagogues of Galilee.

2. What did Jesus commission the 12 disciples to preach?

Answer: LK 9:[1] Then he called his twelve disciples together, and gave them power and authority over all devils, and to cure diseases. **[2]** And he sent them to preach the kingdom of God, and to heal the sick. **[6]** And they departed, and went through the towns, preaching the gospel, and healing every where.

3. What did Jesus commission the 70 to preach?

Answer: LK 10:[1] After these things the Lord appointed other seventy also, and sent them two and two before his face into every city and place, whither he himself would come. **[2]** Therefore said he unto them, The harvest truly is great, but the labourers are few: pray ye therefore the Lord of the harvest, that he would send forth labourers into his harvest. **[9]** And heal the sick that are therein, and say unto them, The kingdom of God is come nigh unto you.

4. What did Jesus commission others to preach?

Answer: LK 9:[59] And he said unto another, Follow me. But he said, Lord, suffer me first to go and bury my father. **[60]** Jesus said unto him, Let the dead bury their dead: but go thou and preach the kingdom of God.

5. What did those in the early church (the book of Acts) preach?

Answer: ACTS 8:[12] But when they believed Philip preaching the things concerning the kingdom of God, and the name of Jesus Christ, they were baptized, both men and women.

6. What did the Apostle Paul preach?

Answer: ACTS 17:[6] These that have turned the world upside down are come hither also; **[7]** Whom Jason hath received: and these all do contrary to the decrees of Caesar, saying that there is another king, one Jesus.

ACTS 19:[8] And he went into the synagogue, and spake boldly for the space of three months, disputing and persuading the things concerning the kingdom of God.

ACTS 28:[30] And Paul dwelt two whole years in his own hired house, and received all that came in unto him, **[31]** Preaching the kingdom of God, and teaching those things which concern the Lord Jesus Christ, with all confidence, no man forbidding him.

7. What message is to be preached in this age?

Answer: LK 16: [16] The law and the prophets were until John: since that time the kingdom of God is preached, and every man presseth into it.

MT 24: [14] And this gospel of the kingdom shall be preached in all the world for a witness unto all nations; and then shall the end come.

8. Is the gospel of the kingdom referring to salvation?

Answer: MT 19:[16] And, behold, one came and said unto him, Good Master, what good thing shall I do, that I may have eternal life?

[22] But when the young man heard that saying, he went away sorrowful: for he had great possessions. **[23]** Then said Jesus unto his disciples, Verily I say unto you, That a rich man shall hardly enter into the kingdom of heaven.

ACTS 28: [23] And when they had appointed him a day, there came many to him into his lodging; to whom he expounded and testified the kingdom of God, persuading them concerning Jesus, both out of the law of Moses, and out of the prophets, from morning till evening. **[24]** And some believed the things

which were spoken, and some believed not.
[28] Be it known therefore unto you, that the salvation of God is sent unto the Gentiles, and that they will hear it.

9. Within the gospel of Christ is the preaching of: a. His redemptive work. b. God's grace. c. His authority to be one's Lord. d. all of the above.

Answer: 1 CO 15: [3] For I delivered unto you first of all that which I also received, how that Christ died for our sins according to the scriptures; **[4]** And that he was buried, and that he rose again the third day according to the scriptures:

ACTS 20: [24] But none of these things move me, neither count I my life dear unto myself, so that I might finish my course with joy, and the

ministry, which I have received of the Lord Jesus, to testify the gospel of the grace of God. **[25]** And now, behold, I know that ye all, among whom I have gone preaching the kingdom of God, shall see my face no more.

ROM 10:[9] That if you confess with your mouth, "Jesus is Lord," and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved. **[10]** For it is with your heart that you believe and are justified, and it is with your mouth that you confess and are saved.

10. The gospel of the kingdom was responded to by?

Answer: MK 1:[14] Now after that John was put in prison, Jesus came into Galilee, preaching the gospel of the kingdom of God, **[15]** And saying, The time is fulfilled, and the

kingdom of God is at hand: repent ye, and believe the gospel.

[18] To open their eyes and turn them from darkness to light, and from the power of Satan to God, so that they may receive forgiveness of sins and a place among those who are sanctified by faith in me.' **[19]** "So then, King Agrippa, I was not disobedient to the vision from heaven. **[20]** First to those in Damascus, then to those in Jerusalem and in all Judea, and to the Gentiles also, I preached that they should repent and turn to God and prove their repentance by their deeds.

ACTS 8:[12] But when they believed Philip preaching the things concerning the kingdom of God, and the name of Jesus Christ, they were baptized, both men and women.

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