

The Gospel - What Is It?

A pastor was once asked, "What is the Gospel?" His reply, "Well, you know, Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John." The pastor had confused the four gospels with the Gospel. What is the difference? The four gospels are the inspired accounts of the life and ministry of Jesus Christ, but they are not the Gospel. The Gospel is the message Jesus brought when He was here on the earth.

The Gospel Jesus Preached

The Gospel Jesus preached was not a message about His person. He did not go about Galilee and Judea relating all the things He had done. Rather, He proclaimed a specific message from God the Father. The Apostle Peter stated: "The word which God sent unto the children of Israel, preaching peace by Jesus Christ: (he is Lord of all:) That word, I say, ye know, which was published throughout all Judaea, and began from Galilee, after the baptism which John preached" (Acts 10:36-37). The message Jesus brought was from the Father. It was sent to the children of Israel and was the fulfillment of a prophecy given in the book of Malachi. "Behold, I will send my messenger, and he shall prepare the way before me: and the Lord, whom ye seek, shall suddenly come to his temple, even the messenger of the covenant, whom ye delight in: behold, he shall come, saith the LORD of hosts" (Mal. 3:1). John the Baptist was the messenger who prepared the way.

Jesus Christ was the divine Messenger-the Messenger of The Covenant. The message Jesus brought-the Gospel-is the New Covenant message. Moses was the mediator of the Old Covenant, but Jesus Christ is the mediator of the New. The message Jesus brought is the New Testament Gospel. Mark tells us when this Gospel began: "The beginning of the gospel of Jesus Christ, the Son of God" (Mark 1:1). John first came preaching the baptism of repentance. Then we read: "Now after that John was put in prison, 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). The Gospel Jesus brought is the one and only true Gospel. It was a message about the Kingdom of God.

The Gospel of Christ

If the one and only true Gospel is the Gospel of the Kingdom of God, what is the Gospel of Jesus Christ? It is the same thing. The Gospel of Jesus Christ is the Gospel of the Kingdom of God. Christ's Gospel is the Gospel Jesus preached, the message sent from God the Father. This is why it is sometimes referred to as the Gospel of God. So, the Gospel of Christ, the Gospel of the Kingdom of God, and the Gospel of God are all the same thing-the message Jesus Christ preached. Many have been led to believe that the Gospel is a message about what Christ did when He was here on the earth. As a result they believe in Christ, but they do not really believe what He taught. The fact is: Many do not know what Jesus taught. They do not realize the message Jesus taught was the Gospel of the Kingdom of God.

Jesus said the Gospel He preached came from the Father. He said, ". . . I have not spoken of myself; but the Father which sent me, he gave me a commandment, what I should say, and what I should speak. And I know that his commandment is life everlasting: whatsoever I speak therefore, even as the Father said unto me, so I speak" (John 12:49-50). The message sent from God the Father was the Good News of the Kingdom of God. Jesus Christ was the Spokesman-the Word that was made flesh and dwelt among us (John 1:14). His Gospel ushered in an entirely new age. "The law and the prophets were until John: since that time the kingdom of God is preached, and every man presseth into it" (Luke 16:16).

The word "gospel" comes from the Old English word "godspell," which meant "good news," or "announcement of glad tidings." The word "gospel" in the New Testament is translated from the Greek

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word euaggelion. Our English word “evangelism” is also translated from euaggelion, which means “to preach the gospel.” Jesus mentioned the Kingdom of God many times during His public ministry. Notice a few examples: “And he said unto them, I must preach the kingdom of God to other cities also: for therefore am I sent” (Luke 4:43). “And Jesus went about all the cities and villages, teaching in their synagogues, and preaching the gospel of the kingdom, and healing every sickness and every disease among the people” (Matt. 9:35). “But seek ye first the kingdom of God, and his righteousness; and all these things shall be added unto you” (Matt. 6:33). In the Lord’s Prayer He included the request that we pray, “Thy kingdom come” (Matt. 6:10).

Are There Many Gospels?

About twenty years after the death and resurrection of Christ, the Apostle Paul warned the Galatians: “I marvel that ye are so soon removed from him that called you into the grace of Christ unto another gospel: Which is not another; but there be some that trouble you, and would pervert the gospel of Christ” (Gal. 1:6-7). What was taking place is that the Gospel of Jesus Christ was being changed to a gospel about Christ, and His message was lost in the confusion. See *A Dictionary of the Bible*, by James Hastings, s.v. “Gospel.” Paul warned: “But though we, or an angel from heaven, preach any other gospel unto you than that which we have preached unto you, let him be accursed. As we said before, so say I now again, If any man preach any other gospel unto you than that ye have received, let him be accursed” (Gal. 1:8-9).

Today, many people do not know what the Gospel is. Rather, they believe a different gospel. They have lost sight of the Gospel of the Kingdom of God. When Jesus began His ministry He made it clear that to be saved it was necessary to believe the Gospel. His words were: “. . . The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God is at hand: repent ye, and believe the gospel” (Mark 1:15). His parting words of instruction to His apostles were: “. . . Go ye into all the world, and preach the gospel to every creature. He that believeth and is baptized shall be saved; but he that believeth not shall be damned” (Mark 16:15-16). The apostles were commissioned to preach the Gospel. This Gospel was not a message about the Person of Christ; it was the message about the coming Kingdom of God.

This was the same message the Apostle Paul preached. Notice the following passages. They all refer to the Apostle Paul:

Confirming the souls of the disciples, and exhorting them to continue in the faith, and that we must through much tribulation enter into the kingdom of God (Acts 14:22).

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 19:8).

And now, behold, I know that ye all, among whom I have gone preaching the kingdom of God, shall see my face no more (Acts 20:25).

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 (Acts 28:23).

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

There are not many gospels; there is only one true gospel-the Gospel of the Kingdom of God! This was the message that was consistently taught by Christ, by the apostles and New Testament evangelists (Acts 8:12), and by the Apostle Paul.

What Does the Word “Kingdom” Mean?

Jesus was not talking about something that was within the heart of man, nor was He talking about a church. He was talking about a literal kingdom. Any dictionary will tell you that a kingdom is a major territorial unit which has a monarchical form of government with a king or queen as its head. A kingdom

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consists of four things: (1) a king or head of state; (2) territory over which to rule; (3) laws by which to govern; and (4) subjects over which to rule. All of these requirements will be met when Jesus returns to establish His kingdom on this earth. Notice what the prophets foretold:

For unto us a child is born, unto us a son is given: and the government shall be upon his shoulder: and his name shall be called Wonderful, Counsellor, The mighty God, The everlasting Father, The Prince of Peace. Of the increase of his government and peace there shall be no end, upon the throne of David, and upon his kingdom, to order it, and to establish it with judgment and with justice from henceforth even for ever. The zeal of the LORD of hosts will perform this (Isa. 9:6-7).

I saw in the night visions, and, behold, one like the Son of man came with the clouds of heaven, and came to the Ancient of days, and they brought him near before him. And there was given him dominion, and glory, and a kingdom, that all people, nations, and languages, should serve him: his dominion is an everlasting dominion, which shall not pass away, and his kingdom that which shall not be destroyed. . . . And the kingdom and dominion, and the greatness of the kingdom under the whole heaven, shall be given to the people of the saints of the most High, whose kingdom is an everlasting kingdom, and all dominions shall serve and obey him (Dan. 7:13-14, 27).

And out of his [Christ's] mouth goeth a sharp sword, that with it he should smite the nations: and he shall rule them with a rod of iron: and he treadeth the winepress of the fierceness and wrath of Almighty God. And he hath on his vesture and on his thigh a name written, KING OF KINGS, AND LORD OF LORDS (Rev. 19:15-16).

The angel told His mother Mary: "And, behold, thou shalt conceive in thy womb, and bring forth a son, and shalt call his name JESUS. He shall be great, and shall be called the Son of the Highest: and the Lord God shall give unto him the throne of his father David" (Luke 1:31-32). When Jesus was asked by Pilate if He was a king, ". . . Jesus answered, Thou sayest that I am a king. To this end was I born, and for this cause came I into the world. . . ." (John 18:37).

Jesus Christ will return to this earth to establish a literal kingdom-the Kingdom of God. Few people today seem to realize this aspect of Christ's work. Many seem to believe that the Kingdom of God could not apply to this time of grace. In effect, they reject the Good News of the Kingdom of God; they do not believe the true Gospel! They refuse to believe in the coming wonderful world tomorrow. The Bible describes this coming time.

And it shall come to pass in the last days, that the mountain of the LORD'S house shall be established in the top of the mountains, and shall be exalted above the hills; and all nations shall flow unto it. And many people shall go and say, Come ye, and let us go up to the mountain of the LORD, to the house of the God of Jacob; and he will teach us of his ways, and we will walk in his paths: for out of Zion shall go forth the law, and the word of the LORD from Jerusalem. And he shall judge among the nations, and shall rebuke many people: and they shall beat their swords into plowshares, and their spears into pruninghooks: nation shall not lift up sword against nation, neither shall they learn war any more (Isa. 2:2-4).

Conditions for Entering the Kingdom of God

Jesus came preaching the Gospel of the Kingdom of God. How may we enter into this marvelous kingdom? Jesus' instruction was, "repent and believe the Gospel" (Mark 1:15). Jesus gave us two things to do. We must repent, and we must believe the Gospel. Believing the Gospel means we must also believe on Jesus Christ, the King of the coming Kingdom of God. He is not only our King, but our personal Saviour and great High Priest. Repentance means there has been a change of mind and heart in each individual who has accepted Christ. Accepting Christ as personal Savior means we recognize that Christ died for us, and that we must repent of wrong doing-of sin. To repent means to change the mind with respect to the Law of God; this change of mind leads to a change of life. We must repent of sin. What is sin? The Bible tells us: "Whosoever committeth sin transgresseth also the law: for sin is the transgression of the law" (1

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John 3:4). Sin is the violation of the Law of God-the Ten Commandments. Jesus was once asked, “. . . Good Master, what good thing shall I do, that I may have eternal life?” Jesus replied, “. . . if thou wilt enter into life, keep the commandments” (Matt. 19:16-17). Jesus went on to explain that He was referring to the Ten Commandments.

The Ten Commandments summarize how to live right in the eyes of God. They show us how to manifest love to God and toward our fellow man. They show, in principle, the whole duty of living righteously. They show a way of life that leads to happiness, peace of mind, and joy. They show a manner of living that is contrary to human nature and to the customs and ways of this world. They show the way to eternal life. Jesus said these two principles are necessary for us to do in order to enter the Kingdom of God-repent and believe the Gospel!

The Spiritual Birth

Nicodemus, a Pharisee and leader of the Jews, came to Christ at night. Jesus told him, “. . . Verily, verily, I say unto thee, Except a man be born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God” (John 3:3). Jesus emphasized the Kingdom of God and told Nicodemus the most important aspect he needed to know in order to enter into that kingdom. Jesus said that unless one is born again he cannot enter into the Kingdom of God. What did He mean? Nicodemus, bewildered, asked, “. . . How can a man be born when he is old? can he enter the second time into his mother’s womb, and be born?” (John 3:4). Nicodemus knew Jesus was talking about a literal birth. Jesus went on to explain: “. . . Verily, verily, I say unto thee, Except a man be born of water and of the Spirit, he cannot enter into the kingdom of God. That which is born of the flesh is flesh; and that which is born of the Spirit is spirit. Marvel not that I said unto thee, Ye must be born again. The wind bloweth where it listeth, and thou hearest the sound thereof, but canst not tell whence it cometh, and whither it goeth: so is every one that is born of the Spirit” (John 3:5-8). So, those born of the flesh are flesh, but those born of the spirit are spirit. The Apostle Paul said: “Now this I say, brethren, that flesh and blood cannot inherit the kingdom of God. . . ” (1 Cor. 15:50). The birth Jesus was talking about was the change from flesh to spirit-the change from mortality to immortality. Jesus was talking about the resurrection of the dead.

Paul spoke of the resurrection. He said this of the physical body:

. . . It is sown in corruption; it is raised in incorruption: It is sown in dishonour; it is raised in glory: it is sown in weakness; it is raised in power: It is sown a natural body; it is raised a spiritual body. There is a natural body, and there is a spiritual body. . . . Now this I say, brethren, that flesh and blood cannot inherit the kingdom of God; neither doth corruption inherit incorruption. Behold, I shew you a mystery; We shall not all sleep, but we shall all be changed, In a moment, in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trump: for the trumpet shall sound, and the dead shall be raised incorruptible, and we shall be changed. For this corruptible must put on incorruption, and this mortal must put on immortality (1 Cor. 15:42-44, 50-53).

Jesus instructed Nicodemus that it is possible to be born again, not as a mortal flesh-and-blood baby, but as immortal spirit. Jesus said, God is a Spirit (John 4:24). The Kingdom of God will be made up of those who are born of the Spirit. God created man in His own image-physically. Upon conversion-true repentance and belief in Christ- man receives only a measure of the Holy Spirit. In the resurrection those truly converted will be changed into spirit by that very Spirit dwelling in them. Paul wrote: “But if the Spirit of him that raised up Jesus from the dead dwell in you, he that raised up Christ from the dead shall also quicken your mortal bodies by his Spirit that dwelleth in you” (Rom. 8:11). Man, now created physically in God’s image, is in the process of being created into His image spiritually (1 Cor. 15:49, 2 Cor 3:18, Col. 3:10). Paul makes plain that while flesh and blood cannot inherit the Kingdom of God, yet by means of the resurrection those begotten by the Holy Spirit in this mortal life can, and will be, changed into immortality to be like God Himself (1 John 3:2). This is the birth Jesus spoke of-the spiritual birth into the Kingdom of God. This is what the Gospel is all about!