

Are They Telling You the Truth About the Gospel?

Anthony Buzzard

Ask any student of the Bible and he will probably tell you that the Gospel message of salvation consists of two great truths: 1. Jesus died for our sins. 2. Jesus rose from the dead and ascended to the Father.

Few have stopped to ask themselves: Is this what the Bible teaches?

Open a Bible and begin to read the accounts of Jesus' preaching of the Gospel. Remember that Jesus was commissioned by God to give us the Gospel of salvation (Heb. 2:3). What facts did Jesus present to the public as the Gospel? Did he urge people just to believe in his death and resurrection?

He did not. Not according to Matthew, Mark and Luke. Jesus began in Galilee with an announcement of the Gospel. He called it the Gospel **about the Kingdom of God**:

“Jesus came into Galilee and said, ‘The time is fulfilled; the Kingdom of God is approaching. Repent and *believe in the Gospel*’” (Mark 1:14-15).

Note carefully that he did not yet say a word about his death and resurrection. He commanded repentance (a complete reorientation of thinking and conduct) and belief in the Gospel about **the Kingdom of God**.

In Luke 4:43 Jesus told us the reason for his whole ministry. He stated that he must “proclaim the Gospel about **the Kingdom of God** to other cities also; *that is the reason why God commissioned me.*”

Later Jesus dispatched the disciples to announce the same Gospel Message: “He sent them out to proclaim **the Kingdom of God**...They departed and began going everywhere among the villages *preaching the Gospel*” (Luke 9:2, 6).

Now what was the Gospel Message about? Was it about the death and resurrection of Jesus? Emphatically not. **The disciples did not at this stage even believe that Jesus was going to die and be raised!** Long after they had been preaching the Gospel (Luke 9:6), they still did not accept the idea of Jesus' death and resurrection. Luke 18:31-34 tells us that when Jesus much later described his coming death and resurrection, “They understood none of these things” (Luke 18:34).

And yet they had been “*preaching the Gospel*” (Luke 9:6, 60; 10:9). But information about the death and resurrection of Jesus was not yet part of the Gospel.

After the death and resurrection of Jesus those facts were **added to** the Gospel Message. The Gospel of the Kingdom was still the name for the Gospel, but the new facts about Jesus' death and resurrection were incorporated into that Kingdom Message. But the Good News about the Kingdom was still the principal subject of the Gospel: “When they believed Philip as he

preached the Good News about **the Kingdom of God** and the name of Jesus Christ, they were being baptized, men and women alike” (Acts 8:12). Paul “continued to speak out boldly for three months, reasoning and persuading them about **the Kingdom of God**” (Acts 19:8). “Paul solemnly testified about **the Kingdom of God** and tried to persuade them concerning Jesus...from morning until evening...For two whole years...Paul was preaching **the Kingdom of God** and teaching concerning the Lord Jesus Christ” (Acts 28:23, 30, 31). Paul described his whole mission as “preaching **the Kingdom of God**” (Acts 20:25 — *exactly as Jesus described his ministry*: Luke 4:43).

The death and resurrection of Jesus **are a vital part of the Gospel, but not the whole Gospel**. The basis of the biblical Gospel is the coming Kingdom of God (“Thy Kingdom come”), a political monarchy to be set up in Palestine, with Jerusalem as its capital and its authority extending to the whole world. This is the only hope for the world. The Gospel invites you to rule with Christ in that coming Kingdom (see Isa. 32:1; Dan. 7:18, 22, 27; Ps. 37:11 = Matt. 5:5; Luke 19:11, 17; Rev. 2:26; 3:21; 5:10; 20:1-6; 1 Cor. 6:2; 2 Tim. 2:12; Luke 12:32; Luke 22:28-30). In order to gain immortality and a place in the coming Kingdom we must repent, be baptized and prepare for the coming of Jesus to establish his Kingdom. Such is the Gospel Message proclaimed by Jesus and the Apostles (Mark 1:14-15; Acts 8:12; 2:38; 10:47-48; 19:5; 22:16; 19:8; 20:25; 28:23, 31).

The Meaning of the Term “Kingdom of God”

Preaching in the New Testament means “proclaiming [heralding] the Gospel **about the Kingdom of God** and the name of Jesus” (Acts 8:12). Repentance means believing in that Gospel of the Kingdom, Jesus’ Message (Mark 1:14-15), and reorienting our lives to a new direction, turning away from disobedience to the Messiah, and ourselves becoming communicators of the Kingdom Message (Luke 9:60). It also means accepting the death of Jesus as a sacrificial atonement for our sins, and Jesus’ resurrection. The Kingdom of God is beautifully defined (among other passages) by Mark 11:10 where the crowds rejoice over the prospect of “the coming Kingdom of our father David.”

This understanding of the Kingdom as a real political monarchy coming to power on the earth received Jesus’ wholehearted approval. It was the Pharisees who tried to silence the enthusiasm of the disciples for Jesus and the coming Kingdom. In response Jesus said, “If these [disciples] become silent, the stones will cry out!” (Luke 19:39-40). Later in Acts 1:6 the Apostles, who had just undergone an intense period of training under Jesus in the “affairs of the Kingdom” (Acts 1:3), asked the Master-Teacher “if the time had now arrived for the Kingdom to be restored to Israel.” The New Jerusalem Bible notes that “the apostles still expect the Messianic Kingdom to be the political restoration of David’s dynasty.” This understanding of what the Kingdom of God means was, of course, correct. As Gospel preachers they had been preaching about the Kingdom for several years in the company of the Messiah. Jesus certainly did not suggest in his reply (Acts 1:7) that they had an inadequate knowledge of his central theme and the heart of his Gospel. It was not a question of *whether* the Kingdom would be restored to Israel. It was merely a question of *when* that great event would happen.

Simple common sense is sufficient to tell us that the Lord's agents in the preaching of the Gospel understood what the Kingdom of God was! How otherwise could Jesus have entrusted them with the task of proclaiming his Gospel of the Kingdom, not only in Israel but to the whole world? (Luke 9:2, 6; Matt. 28:19-20).

Note how many scholars correctly define the Kingdom of God:

E. Haenchen: "The preaching of the Kingdom of God obviously refers to the Kingdom of God *which will begin with the Parousia [Second Coming]*" (*Acts of the Apostles*, 1971, p. 141, fn. 2).

H.J. Cadbury, *Acts and Eschatology*: "Nothing obviously distinguishes the term Kingdom of God in Acts from such *apocalyptic [future] use as it has in the gospels.*"

Kevin Giles (*Reformed Theological Review*, Sept.-Dec., 1981): "Luke's understanding of the Kingdom of God is that *it is still in the future and it will mean the restoration of Israel.*" He goes on to quote J. Jervell (*Luke and the People of God*) who refers to the Apostles' question about the restoration of the Kingdom to Israel and says: "Luke's theology anticipated a restored Israel."

Cadbury: Acts includes "many familiar elements" in NT preaching. "**The preachers preach the Kingdom of God** or the things about it" (Acts 1:3; 8:12; 20:25; 28:23, 31). The term Kingdom of God "appears from almost the first verse to the last verse in the book." "Kingdom of God constitutes *a formula* apparently parallel to the writer's more characteristic single verb 'evangelize'...Nothing obviously distinguishes the term Kingdom of God in Acts from such **apocalyptic use** as it has in the synoptic gospels. For example one enters it through much tribulation (Acts 14:22)."

Haenchen: On Acts 28:23: "The Kingdom of God and the Name of Jesus Christ properly stand side by side. The second expression refers to the death and resurrection attested in the holy Scriptures and therefore the Messiahship of Jesus. *Kingdom of God itself describes the entire Christian proclamation*: So in 19:8, 20:25 and 1:3 it also has this meaning. If, on the other hand, as here and in 8:12 and 28:31 it is mentioned along with the events of Jesus, then it has *the futuristic meaning* of which 14:22 speaks. *At the Parousia the future Kingdom will come with the returning Jesus (Luke 21:31)*. Paul's efforts to win the Jews lasted throughout the day. This shows how keen he was to win them" (*Acts of the Apostles*, p. 773).

Earle Ellis: "In Acts the term Kingdom of God is used *only of a future event*... The Kingdom will have a glorious and public manifestation *in the future*... Like the creative word in Genesis (1:3) **the word of the Kingdom** [cp. Matt. 13:19] contains within it the reality of the new creation itself. Nevertheless the Kingdom also *remains in the future and its coming is associated with the Parousia*, the glorious appearance of Jesus at the close of the age (Lk. 19:11; 22:29; 11:2; Acts 1:7, 11). Eternal life awaits the age to come (18:30). *By their response to the Kingdom message men reveal whether they are destined for the 'life of the age to come'* (Acts 8:1-17; 13:46, 48)" (*Luke, New Century Bible*, p. 13).

Everything depends on our response to the Gospel Message about the Kingdom as Jesus preached it. The gospels (Matthew, Mark, Luke and John) are themselves evangelism models, inviting us to repent and believe the Gospel about the Kingdom (Mark 1:14-15) as well as in Jesus' death and resurrection.

Any subtraction from the Gospel is a serious and dangerous mistake. Jesus actually insists on an intelligent grasp of God's plan/Gospel of the Kingdom of God. Jesus makes grasping the Gospel of the Kingdom an essential requisite for repentance and forgiveness:

“If they were to perceive and understand [the Gospel about the Kingdom, Matt. 13:19], they would repent and be forgiven” (Mark 4:11-12).

Jesus' first command and the basic thesis of all his Gospel teaching is:

Repent (change your mind and life) and believe the Gospel about the Kingdom of God being at hand (Mark 1:14-15). Everything else Jesus and the Apostles said is an expansion of this key core concept.

Jesus also said that the Gospel of the Kingdom is so vital to salvation that “when anyone hears the Gospel about the Kingdom the Devil comes and snatches away what has been sown in his heart so that he may not believe it and *be saved*” (Luke 8:12).

Paul was also a career preacher of **the Gospel of the Kingdom**, following Jesus his Lord (Acts 20:24-25; 28:23, 31; 19:8; cp. Acts 8:12).

Christians are also commanded to preach that same Gospel of the Kingdom (Matt. 28:19-20; Luke 9:60). How well are we doing with this task? How well are you doing?