

## The Christian Gospel as Jesus Preached It: It is about the Kingdom of God

"In the Book of Acts the Kingdom of God was still the general **formula** for the substance of Christian teaching..." (*Hastings Dictionary of the Bible*, Vol. II, p. 855).

On the lips of Jesus the term Kingdom of God unquestionably summarized the very heart of his Message. "The Kingdom of God is the central theme of the teaching of Jesus, and it involves his **whole understanding** of his own **person and work**"<sup>1</sup> (*Theological Word Book of the Bible*, Alan Richardson, p. 119).

"The Kingdom announced by the Messiah who is the Son of Man is possible only through his death and will be finally and fully realized on earth only at his glorious return. *This is indeed the heart of the Gospel.*" (Donald Hagner, PhD, *Word Biblical Commentary on Matthew, 1-13*, p. 214).

"The Son of God came to give us an **understanding** so that we might know God" (I John 5:20).

### W.C. Allen, MA, Prof. of OT at Oxford, on the Kingdom of God:

The objective analysis of the Kingdom of God in Matthew, provided by the *Dictionary of Christ and the Gospels*,<sup>2</sup> ought to serve as a much-needed guide to all our thinking about the Kingdom. The Gospel as Jesus and Paul preached it is about the Kingdom and so an inaccurate understanding of the Kingdom leads automatically to an inaccurate Gospel:

The Kingdom — **the central subject** of Christ's doctrine. With this he began his ministry (4:17) and wherever he went he taught it as Good News [**Gospel**](4:23). The Kingdom he taught was coming, but not in his lifetime. After His ascension he would come as Son of Man on the clouds of heaven (16:27, 19:28, 24:30; 25:31) and would sit on the throne of His glory... Then the twelve Apostles would sit on twelve thrones judging the twelve tribes of Israel (19:28). In the meantime he himself must suffer and die and be raised from the dead. How else could he come on the clouds of heaven? And the disciples were to **preach the Good News [Gospel] of the coming Kingdom** (10:7, 24:14) among all nations making disciples by baptism (28:18). The body of disciples thus gained would naturally form a society bound by common aims. Hence the disciples of the Kingdom would form a new spiritual Israel (21:43; [Cp. Gal. 6:16]).

The same authority goes on to say:

In view of the needs of this new Israel of Christ's disciples, who were to await his coming on the clouds of heaven, it is natural that a large part of the teaching recorded in the Gospel should concern **the qualifications required in those who hoped to enter the**

---

<sup>1</sup>Cp. 'golf tournament' and 'tennis tournament' would be meaningless if golf and tennis are not understood.

<sup>2</sup>W.C. Allen, MA, Prof. of OT at Oxford, on the Kingdom of God, Vol. II, p. 145

**Kingdom when it came**...Thus the parables convey some lesson about the nature of the Kingdom and the period of **preparation for it**. It should be sufficiently obvious that if we ask what meaning the parables had for the editor of the first Gospel, the answer must be that he chose them because...they taught lessons about the Kingdom of God *in the sense in which that phrase is used everywhere in the Gospel of the Kingdom which was to come, when the Son of Man came upon the clouds of heaven.*

Thus the Parable of the Sower illustrates the varying **reception met with by the Good News [Gospel] of the Kingdom as it is preached amongst men**. That of the tares also deals not with the Kingdom itself, but with **the period of preparation for it**. At the end of the age, the Son of Man will come **to inaugurate His Kingdom**...There is nothing here nor elsewhere in this Gospel to suggest that **the scene of the Kingdom is other than the present world renewed**, restored and purified.<sup>3</sup>

AB: The last sentence of our quotation makes the excellent point that Matthew (and the New Testament) does not expect believers to “go to heaven,” but that Jesus will come back to the earth to rule with them in a renewed earth. The perceptive reader of the New Testament will note the striking difference between the biblical view of the Kingdom, and thus of the Gospel of salvation, and what in post-biblical times was substituted for it: a departure of the faithful at death to a realm removed from the earth. The popular idea that the Kingdom is mainly a spiritual state of mind or life-style *now* is false to the New Testament. Joseph of Arimathea, a Christian, was “waiting for the Kingdom” after the ministry of Jesus (Mark 15:43). Luke 19:11ff. teaches us to connect the arrival of the Kingdom with the future return of Jesus. (cp., above: “The Kingdom He taught was coming, but not in His lifetime.” “In Matthew [and in the NT] the Kingdom of God is conceived, **first of all**, as something **in the future**” (cited below). So say leading analysts of the Gospel records.

We may add a further statement from a recognized authority on Luke:

It cannot really be disputed that Luke means by the Kingdom **a future** entity. The spiritualizing interpretation according to which the Kingdom is present in the Spirit and in the Church is completely misleading...It is *the message* of the Kingdom that is present, which in Luke is distinguished from the Kingdom itself. He knows nothing of an immanent [i.e., already present] development on the basis of the preaching of the Kingdom.<sup>4</sup>

*The International Standard Bible Encyclopedia* (1929), Vol. 4, p. 2667 gets the emphasis on the future right, and thus clarifies the Christian Gospel:

“The Kingdom of God is at hand” had the inseparable connotation “judgment is at hand” and in this context,” Repent,” in Mark 1:14, 15 must mean “[to avoid being judged], lest you be judged.” Hence our Lord’s teaching about salvation **had primarily a future content: positively admission into the Kingdom of God and negatively, deliverance from the preceding judgment**. So the Kingdom of God is the highest good of Christ’s teaching... Man’s nature is to be perfectly adapted to his spiritual environment and man is to be “with Christ” (Luke 22:30) and with the patriarchs (Matt. 8:11). Whatever [?!] the Kingdom is, it is most certainly not exhausted by a mere reformation of the present order of material things.”

---

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*, emphasis added. The same view of the Kingdom is expressed by the author of this article on Matthew in his commentary on Matthew (W.C. Allen, *The International Critical Commentary, St. Matthew*, T & T Clark, 1907, pp. lxxvii-lxxi).

<sup>4</sup> Hans Conzelmann, *The Theology of St. Luke*, p. 122.

***Good News According to Mark***, Eduard Schweizer:

“Mark 1:14, 15: Mark gives a brief summary of the preaching of Jesus. Preaching and Good News are Mark’s favorite expressions. The call of Jesus is accurately summed up in 1:15, where the association of repentance and faith reveals the language of the church (Acts 5:31; 11:18; 20:21). Mark’s concern is to make clear that in this preaching Jesus continues to go forth into the world and this call, therefore, is being directed also to the one who reads this Gospel today. Consequently this section serves as a caption to the whole gospel (cp. the epilogue).

“**The Kingdom of God.** When Jesus proclaims that the Kingdom of God is near, he is adopting a concept which was coined in the OT. Although it denotes God’s sovereignty over creation (Ps 103:19; 145:11ff.) it refers primarily to God’s unchallenged sovereignty in the end time (Isa 52:7). . . . Judaism spoke of the reign of God which comes after the annihilation of every foe and the end of all suffering. . . . In the NT the **Kingdom of God** is conceived first of all as something in the future (Mark 9:1, 47, 14:25; Matt. 13:41-43; 20:21; Luke 22:16, 18 I Cor 15:50. et al) which comes from God (Mark 9:1; Matt. 6:10; Luke 17:20; 19:11). Therefore it is something man can only wait for (Mark 15:43), seek (Matt. 6:33); receive (Mark 10:15; cp Luke 12:32) and inherit (I Cor 6:9f; Gal 5:21; James 2:5), but is not able to create it by himself. . . . In the acts and words of Jesus the future Kingdom has come upon him already. It is decided at that very moment whether or not he will ever be in the Kingdom. . . . Repentance is nothing less than a whole-hearted commitment to the Good News” (pp. 45, 46, 47).

**Ernest Scott, D.D. Prof of NT, Union Theological Seminary, NY, 1931, pp. 11-21**, on the other hand reveals the hopeless confusion into which the church has fallen in regard to Jesus’ Gospel and thus of the Christian faith. He seems uncertain about the Gospel, but gives us a good sense of what it meant to Jesus and his followers:

“It seems almost impossible to define the Christian ‘Gospel.’ Sometimes it is identified with our religion as a whole, sometimes with some element in it which is regarded as central. To accept the Gospel is to believe in the atonement or the love of God, or the revelation in Christ or the fact of human brotherhood.

“Yet it is well to remember that the word which is now used so loosely had, at the outset a meaning which was clearly understood. “Jesus came into Galilee, preaching the Gospel of the Kingdom of God and saying, The time is fulfilled and the KG is at hand.” The Gospel underwent a marvelous development. . . . but the Good News has always been essentially what it was at the first — **the announcement of the Kingdom.** It is evident from the manner in which Jesus made the announcement that he took up an idea which was already familiar. He did not explain what he meant by the Kingdom, for he could assume that all his hearers were looking forward to it. Their hope for it had been newly stimulated by John the Baptist. . . . They had long been thinking of the Kingdom and wondering when it would come and a prophet had now arisen who declared that it was close at hand. . . . In the religion of Israel we must seek for the immediate origin of the Kingdom idea of Jesus. . . . The idea persisted long after the royal house was firmly established that the reigning king was only the vice-regent of the invisible King. . . . Israel had been chosen by a unique God who was known as yet only by His own people, but was nonetheless King of the whole earth. The day was coming when all nations would own his sovereignty. . . . On the higher levels of prophecy the purified Israel of the future is conceived as attracting all nations by its high example, to the service of the One God. More often it is assumed that Israel when fully disciplined will be restored to God’s favor and advanced by Him to the sovereign place (Acts 1:6). As King of this preeminent people God will reign at last over the world. . . . On the one hand God is already King. On the other hand it is recognized that the Kingship lies in the future. . . . They look for a coming day when He will overcome all usurping powers and assert Himself as King. So the prophets keep before them the vision of a new age when the Kingdom of God will be fully manifested. In that happy time Israel will be exalted, the cause of justice will be established, the earth full of the glory of the Lord. Nature in that day will be restored to its

pristine glory and the wolf will lie down with the lamb and cattle will feed in large pastures, the light of the moon will be as the light of the sun. He [and His Messiah] will reign from Mount Zion and all nations will serve Him. King over a righteous nation he will extend his dominion over the whole earth.

AB: The New Testament is based on the Old. Jesus came to:

1) Proclaim the Gospel about the Kingdom of God (Luke 4:43). This is the whole reason for Christianity.

2) Confirm the promises made to the Fathers (Rom 15:8)

3) To give us an understanding that we might know God (I John 5:20)

4) To make people righteous not only by his death but by his knowledge (Isa 53:11).

5) To invite whoever will believe in God's plan for themselves and the world to prepare now to rule the world with Jesus when he returns "Don't you know the saints are going to manage the world" (I Cor. 6:2, Moffat, see also Dan. 7:14, 18, 22, 27; Rev 3:21; 2:26; 5:10; 20:1-6; Matt. 5:5; 19:28).

In post-biblical times the original faith in the Gospel of the Kingdom suffered massive alteration, turning the Gospel into something quite different. Greeks rather than Jews became leaders in the church and they imported alien Greek philosophy into the church's teachings. Gal. 3:8 which defines the Christian Gospel as the content of the promises made to Abraham, about land, progeny and blessing, is missing from contemporary versions of the "Gospel."

This alteration of the original faith led finally in the 1500's to the Reformation which was a plea to go back to the Bible. But these reformers did not fully recapture the Gospel of the Kingdom. The process of restoration is furthered when people earnestly seek the original meaning of the Kingdom of God as preached by the original Jesus. The Gospel itself is all about the Kingdom of God and "Gospel" should never be divorced from the Kingdom. The pagan notion of "heaven" for "souls" at death has replaced the hope of the Kingdom coming on earth. That paganism must be banished from the Christian vocabulary if the Bible is to be understood.

**Harper Collins, Bible Dictionary:** "The Gospel is the proclamation of the Kingdom announced by Jesus (Mark 1:14, 15) and now proclaimed by the church."

But do churches preach the Gospel of the Kingdom of God?

Gary Burge, *NIV Application Commentary*: "The Gospel as most of my church friends and I have known it in the past **is so small a part of the whole deal, that it is hard to call it an accurate Gospel at all.** Perhaps this limited Gospel message as proclaimed by modern Christians explains the limited impact it is having on America today."

**Revisioning Evangelical Theology.** "Stanley Grenz has reviewed the failed attempts of evangelical theology to fire the imagination of the modern world. He argues for the Kingdom of God as the new organizing center of what we say and do."

**Theology, News and Notes** (Fuller Theological Seminary, Spring 2004:

"Over the course of the past year, faculty from each of Fuller's three schools have met together to discuss the question: What is the Gospel? A dozen years ago, the late Robert Guelich made the question the topic of his inaugural address, noting that years of professional work has returned him again and again to this fundamental subject. Guelich told the story of an encounter with the founder Charles Fuller after a seminary forum, with the "inspiration of Scripture" as its topic. Fuller commented that he longed for the day when the seminary would host a forum on the question: 'What is the Gospel'"

AB: This is an amazing admission. The fact is that they really are not sure what the Gospel is, and yet they say they are saving people by preaching “it.” The plain fact is that the Gospel of the Kingdom, including of course the ratifying and atoning blood of Jesus and his resurrection, is the Gospel. Until the “heaven” at death teaching, which is Plato’s and not Jesus,’ is dropped, how can progress be made? And how can we be sure that anyone is saved by believing the teaching of Plato and calling it the teaching of Jesus? Is God as sloppy as we are with our thinking?! Is He so indulgent that He really does not care as long as we are sincere, although ignorant, — of the nature of man, his destiny, the identity of God and Jesus?

**Shailer Matthews**, D.D., Professor of Theology, Chicago Seminary, *The Messianic Hope in the New Testament* (University of Chicago Press, 1905, pp. 144, 155):

“It is a serious error to hold that the Kingdom of God plays no important role in apostolic Christianity. Such a view both lacks historical perspective and is at variance with the entire thought of the literature of apostolic Christianity. The very name of the new movement, *Christianity*, would suggest the contrary opinion. So far from the eschatological Kingdom of God being a secondary element in the early church, *it is its great conditioning belief*. The preaching of the first evangelists was not a call to ethical ideals or an argument as to certain truths. Rather it was the proclamation of a Message.... As regards the person of the Messiah, there is of course no question that the early church believed that Jesus was the Christ who had gone to heaven, whence he would come to introduce the new age and the new Kingdom. **This was the very core of the entire Christian movement.**” “TO THINK OF JESUS AS DELIBERATELY USING A TERM WITH A MEANING DIFFERENT FROM WHAT IT WOULD HAVE BEEN FOR OTHERS IS NOT ONLY TO RAISE A QUESTION AS TO HIS MORALS, BUT AS TO HIS CAPACITY AS A TEACHER.”

**A professor of missiology laments the failure of seminars to relay the Gospel as Jesus preached it:**

A leading evangelism expert, Dr. Mortimer Arias (*Announcing the Reign of God*, Fortress Press, 1984), observed: “**We seem to be faced with what can be called an eclipse of the Kingdom of God lasting from the apostolic age to the present, particularly in our theology of evangelization.**” He adds: “**The Kingdom of God is God’s own dream, His project for the world and for humanity! He makes us dreamers and He wants us to be seduced by His dream and to dream with Him...It is not we who dream but God who dreams in us.**”

“When I left the seminary I had no clear idea of the Kingdom of God, and I had no place in my theology for the second coming, the Parousia...I had no concerns about the future. Thousands of books are printed and circulated every year on evangelization; most of these fall into the category of ‘how to’ manuals for churches (devising plans, strategies, methodologies and goals)...Our traditional mini-theologies (the ‘plan of salvation’ or ‘four spiritual laws’) *do not do justice to the whole Gospel*.

“Not all this activity or activism is a sign of health or creativity...The Good News of the **Kingdom of God** is not the usual way we describe the gospel and evangelization...**The Kingdom of God** has practically disappeared from evangelistic preaching and has been ignored by traditional ‘evangelism.’ The evangelistic message has been centered in personal salvation, individual conversion, and incorporation into the church. The **Kingdom of God** as a parameter or perspective or as content of the proclamation has been *virtually absent*...Those interested in evangelization have not yet been interested in the **Kingdom** theme...Why not try Jesus’ own definition of his Mission — and ours? For Jesus evangelization was no more and no less than announcing the Kingdom of God” (Dr. Mortimer Arias, *Announcing the Reign of God*, 1984).

**Churchill said:**

“If you have an important point to make, don’t try to be subtle or clever. Use a pile driver. Hit the point once. Then come back and hit it again. Then hit it a third time — a tremendous whack.”

*Anthony Buzzard*  
*Atlanta Bible College*  
*website: restorationfellowship.org*

*ed. May, 2009.*

**FACTS:**

## **THE KINGDOM OF GOD IN MATTHEW MARK AND LUKE**

**Anthony Buzzard**

Totals 57 refs. to Kingdom as the event of the Second Coming.  
6 might refer to “presence” of Kingdom.

**MATTHEW**

**1:1 Jesus Christ (= Messiah, = King of Israel and the world)**

2:6 a ruler who will shepherd my people Israel.

3:2 Kingdom at hand = wheat into barn and chaff burnt up (3:12)

4:17 Kingdom is at hand

**4:23** The Kingdom of God announced city by city

5:20 shall **enter** the KG

5:35 **Jerusalem** is the **city** of the great king

6:10 Kingdom is to come. May your Kingdom come!

7:14 enter life =

7:21 enter Kingdom = “**That day**” (7:22) = “that day in the Kingdom” (Matt. 26:29)

8:11 come from the East and West to enter the KG; others will weep and gnash teeth

9:35 Kingdom at hand. Gospel of the Kingdom preached city by city. Pillar text.

10:7 Apostles preach Kingdom as at hand

10:23 Son of Man comes

**11:12 Present Kingdom suffers violence**

**12:28 Kingdom comes upon you**

13:43 *Will* shine forth in the Kingdom

16:27 See Christ coming in the Kingdom

18:3 enter Kingdom/ Life or hellfire

19:23 enter Kingdom = OBTAIN ETERNAL LIFE = inherit Kingdom, v. 29—in that day

19:28 New Age when they rule in the Kingdom=INHERIT ETERNAL LIFE (v.29)

20:21 James and John desire places in the KG

21:31 shall enter the Kingdom

24:3, 27 coming of the Son of Man

25:31-34 inherit the Kingdom of God

26:29 eat and drink in the Kingdom of God

plus all the promises of a future participation in the marriage feast and future reward.

**(20 future KG. 2 present)**

**MARK**

1:14 15 Believe in the Gospel of the Kingdom which is at hand

1:38, 39 Preaching/heralding

2:2 preaching **word**. 2:13 teaching; 3:14 disciples preach

8:38 9:1 Son of Man comes (=will come) in his Kingdom

9:43, 45, 47 enter life = enter Kingdom at same time as enter hell=cast into hell

10:15, (9:37) (Cp. John 17:8) Receive Jesus = receive Kingdom=enter it.

10:23 Enter Kingdom = Inherit eternal life, v.17

10:25,26 = Enter Kingdom, be saved, for the sake of the Gospel, eternal life

10:37 James and John in future Kingdom

11:10 future Coming Kingdom of our father David

13:26 Son of Man coming

13:32 That day coming, v.33 appointed time

14:25 eat in the future Kingdom= that day when

14:62 coming in the clouds of heaven at second coming.

**15:43 (Still) waiting for the kingdom (last ref. to Kingdom)**

**(12 future. 0 present)**

## **LUKE**

1:2 Servants of the **word** = the Gospel

1:32, 33 future throne of David and Kingdom

1:68 redemption of Israel

2:38 redemption in Jerusalem

3:17 wheat into barn. wicked into hell

**4:43 I must preach the Gospel about the Kingdom to the other cities also: That is why I was commissioned.**

9:27 vision of the future Kingdom

9:62 fit for the future Kingdom

10:9 Kingdom is near

**11:20 Kingdom come upon you (?) (difficult saying)**

12:32 Kingdom will be given to the faithful

12:40 Son of Man coming

13:24 Enter the Kingdom

13:28 Sit in the Kingdom with Abraham

14:8, 14, 15, 24 Wedding Feast, Resurrection, Kingdom

16:6 children of light (kingdom)

16:16 Gospel of the Kingdom preached **from John** until now; everyone solemnly urged to enter

17:21 **Kingdom amongst you. “Within” is almost certainly not right. (? or a reference to the Kingdom being all over the place in the future, not local)**

17:24 Son of Man like lightening in his day

18:8 will he find faith when he comes?

18:18 Enter Kingdom in future

18:24, 30 Enter Kingdom in future

19:11 Kingdom will appear in the future in Jerusalem at Parousia

20:25 attaining to **that age, i.e. the Kingdom via resurrection when Jesus comes back (I Cor. 15:23).**

21:31 **Kingdom appears at the future coming of Jesus**

22:18, 18 future eating and drinking in the future

22:28-30 thrones in the future Kingdom

22:69 Son of Man coming the future

23:42 come in the future Kingdom

23:51 waiting for the Kingdom

24:21 time for the Redemption of Israel.  
(Total: **Future KG 25. Present KG 2**)

***Luke 8:12 “Whenever someone hears the Gospel of the Kingdom [Matt. 13:19] the Devil comes and snatches away the word that has been sown in his heart, so that he cannot believe it and be saved”.***

*Mark 4:11, 12: “Seeing they see and don’t understand...if the die, they would repent and be forgiven.” (This is Jesus’ version of justification by faith and being born again of spirit (John 3) or of word — I Pet. 1:22 ff.)*

*Acts 8:12 shows the process in action. “When they believed Philip as he preached the Gospel about the Kingdom and the name of Jesus Christ they were being baptized, both men and women.”*

***Seeing, Hearing, Understanding, Repentance, Forgiveness, baptism in water — all based on the reception of the Gospel/ word of the Kingdom (Matt. 13:19), the program for restoring the glory/ Kingdom lost in Adam and regainable in Christ, including indestructible life, immortality, revealed in the Gospel of the Kingdom (see II Tim. 1:10, Heb. 2:3; 5:9, Mark 1:14, 15).***