

The Gospel of the Kingdom

The gospel for our day is the gospel of the grace of God (Acts 20.24). The word “gospel” ([εὐαγγέλιον](#)) means “good news”. The ascended, glorified Lord revealed this gospel to the Apostle Paul. The clearest definition of it is from Paul’s first letter to the Corinthians,

¹ Now I make known to you, brethren, the gospel which I preached to you, which also you received, in which also you stand, ² by which also you are saved, if you hold fast the word which I preached to you, unless you believed in vain. ³ For I delivered to you as of first importance what I also received, that Christ died for our sins according to the Scriptures, ⁴ and that He was buried, and that He was raised on the third day according to the Scriptures, (1 Corinthians 15.1-4).

This was *Paul’s* gospel. Paul repeatedly referred to it as his own (Romans 2.16, 16.25; Galatians 2.2, 7; 2 Timothy 2.8).

John the Baptizer, Jesus, and the Twelve proclaimed the gospel of the kingdom, *not* the gospel of the grace of God (Acts 20.24). The gospel of the grace of God was not preached until the ascended, glorified Lord revealed it to Paul after He commissioned him to be the apostle of the Gentiles (Romans 11.13). What was this gospel or good news that they proclaimed and how was it different from Paul’s gospel?

The table below compares the Gospel of the Kingdom and the Gospel of the Grace of God.

Gospel of the Kingdom	Gospel of the Grace of God
Proclaimed by John the Baptizer, Jesus, and the Twelve.	Proclaimed by Paul.

Preached to Jew only.	Preached primarily to Gentiles.
Required repentance, baptism, and faith + works.	Requires faith alone, faith + 0.
Content of message was Jesus was the Messiah, the Son of God.	Content of message is the death and resurrection of Christ.
Began with John the Baptizer and stopped during the Acts period (Acts 15.11). Resumes after the Rapture.	Began after Jesus commissioned Paul as the apostle of the Gentiles.
Ended in Jewish unbelief. Will resume after the Body of Christ is completed. Ends in Jewish belief and fulfills the "great commission" and prophecy.	Ends with the completion of the Body of Christ composed of Jews and Gentiles (Rapture).
Gospel during Jesus' earthly ministry and into Acts. Future "great commission" gospel once the Body of Christ is complete.	Our present gospel—until Body of Christ is completed.

The Proclamation of the Gospel of the Kingdom

John the Baptizer acted as the forerunner, the herald, of the Messiah. His ministry and message was to proclaim the good news of the kingdom. Matthew recorded,

¹ Now in those days John the Baptist came, preaching in the wilderness of Judea, saying, ² "Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand." ³ For this is the one referred to by Isaiah the prophet when he said, "The voice of one crying in the wilderness, 'Make ready the way of the Lord, Make His paths straight!'" ⁴ Now John himself had a garment of camel's hair and a leather belt around his waist; and his food was locusts and wild honey. ⁵ Then Jerusalem was going out to him,

and all Judea and all the district around the Jordan; ⁶ and they were being baptized by him in the Jordan River, as they confessed their sins. (Matthew 3.2-6).

After John had been arrested, Jesus himself took up the message of the coming kingdom. Matthew recorded,

¹² Now when Jesus heard that John had been taken into custody, He withdrew into Galilee; ¹³ and leaving Nazareth, He came and settled in Capernaum, which is by the sea, in the region of Zebulun and Naphtali. ¹⁴ This was to fulfill what was spoken through Isaiah the prophet: ¹⁵ “The land of Zebulun and the land of Naphtali, By the way of the sea, beyond the Jordan, Galilee of the Gentiles—¹⁶ “The people who were sitting in darkness saw a great Light, And those who were sitting in the land and shadow of death, Upon them a Light dawned.” ¹⁷ From that time Jesus began to preach and say, “Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand (Matthew 4.12-17).

Jesus was going through all the cities and villages, teaching in their synagogues and proclaiming the gospel of the kingdom, and healing every kind of disease and every kind of sickness (Matthew 9:35).

Mark, succinctly recorded John's message and ministry:

⁴ John the Baptist appeared in the wilderness preaching a baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sins. ⁵ And all the country of Judea was going out to him, and all the people of Jerusalem; and they were being baptized by him in the Jordan River, confessing their sins (Mark 1.4-5).

Until the arrival of John the Baptist, Jewish salvation had been based upon the Mosaic Law and faith in the Levitical

sacrifices. Since the time of Moses, the prophets had proclaimed a kingdom in which Israel would be the head and not the tail (Deuteronomy 28.13) among the nations and that God would set them above the nations of the earth (Deuteronomy 28.1). Hundreds of passages in the Scriptures prophesy this kingdom. The essential features of it were that Israel would be supreme among the nations of the earth, the Messiah would rule from Jerusalem as David's greater Son over the entire earth (Zechariah 14.9), the earth would be restored to Edenic splendor (Jesus referred to this as the "regeneration" (Matthew 19.28), lifespans would be extended vastly, the animal kingdom would be at peace (Isaiah 11.6-8), the earth would be without war (Isaiah 2.4), and this kingdom would be one of unparalleled greatness (Isaiah 2.2). When John appeared, the gospel of the kingdom was added to the Law and the Prophets. The promised King had arrived. Therefore, Jesus proclaimed,

The Law and the Prophets were proclaimed until John; since that time the gospel of the kingdom of God has been preached, and everyone is forcing his way into it (Luke 16:16)

The Provisions of the Gospel of the Kingdom

The gospel of the kingdom required the hearer to repent, be baptized, and believe that Jesus was the foretold Messiah.

¹⁴ *Now after John had been taken into custody, Jesus came into Galilee, preaching the gospel of God, ¹⁵ and saying, "The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God is at hand; repent and believe in the gospel" (Mark 1.14-15).*

⁵ *Then Jerusalem was going out to him, and all Judea and all the district around the Jordan; ⁶ and they were being baptized by him in the Jordan River, as they confessed their sins. (Matthew 3.5-6).*

¹ It happened that while Apollos was at Corinth, Paul passed through the upper country and came to Ephesus, and found some disciples. ² He said to them, "Did you receive the Holy Spirit when you believed?" And they said to him, "No, we have not even heard whether there is a Holy Spirit." ³ And he said, "Into what then were you baptized?" And they said, "Into John's baptism."⁴ Paul said, "John baptized with the baptism of repentance, telling the people to believe in Him who was coming after him, that is, in Jesus." ⁵ When they heard this, they were baptized in the name of the Lord Jesus. ⁶ And when Paul had laid his hands upon them, the Holy Spirit came on them, and they began speaking with tongues and prophesying. (Acts 19.1-6).

After Jesus' resurrection and ascension, the gospel of the kingdom continued to be preached by Peter and the other apostles in which repentance, baptism, and faith were required. Thus, Peter declared in his sermon on Pentecost:

³⁶ Therefore let all the house of Israel know for certain that God has made Him both Lord and Christ—this Jesus whom you crucified." ³⁷ Now when they heard this, they were pierced to the heart, and said to Peter and the rest of the apostles, "Brethren, what shall we do?" ³⁸ Peter said to them, "Repent, and each of you be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins; and you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit (Acts 2.36-38).

The same operational rules were active in Philip's ministry in which he witnessed to the Ethiopian eunuch:

³⁴ The eunuch answered Philip and said, "Please tell me, of whom does the prophet say this? Of himself or of someone

else?" ³⁵ Then Philip opened his mouth, and beginning from this Scripture he preached Jesus to him. ³⁶ As they went along the road they came to some water; and the eunuch *said, "Look! Water! What prevents me from being baptized?" ³⁷ [And Philip said, "If you believe with all your heart, you may." And he answered and said, "I believe that Jesus Christ is the Son of God."] ³⁸ And he ordered the chariot to stop; and they both went down into the water, Philip as well as the eunuch, and he baptized him (Acts 8.34-38).

The Content of the Gospel of the Kingdom

What did the hearers of John and Jesus need to believe? Several scriptures provide the answer.

¹³ Now when Jesus came into the district of Caesarea Philippi, He was asking His disciples, "Who do people say that the Son of Man is?" ¹⁴ And they said, "Some say John the Baptist; and others, Elijah; but still others, Jeremiah, or one of the prophets." ¹⁵ He *said to them, "But who do you say that I am?" ¹⁶ Simon Peter answered, "You are the Christ, the Son of the living God." ¹⁷ And Jesus said to him, "Blessed are you, Simon Barjona, because flesh and blood did not reveal this to you, but My Father who is in heaven (Matthew 16.13-17).

Martha expressed this same faith to Jesus upon the death of Lazarus, her brother:

²³ Jesus *said to her, "Your brother will rise again." ²⁴ Martha *said to Him, "I know that he will rise again in the resurrection on the last day." ²⁵ Jesus said to her, "I am the resurrection and the life; he who believes in Me will live even if he dies, ²⁶ and everyone who lives and believes in Me

*will never die. Do you believe this?" ²⁷ She *said to Him, "Yes, Lord; I have believed that You are the Christ, the Son of God, even He who comes into the world" (John 11.23-27).*

When Jesus first began His ministry, He encountered Nathaniel. John recorded the event:

⁴³ The following day Jesus wanted to go to Galilee, and He found Philip and said to him, "Follow Me." ⁴⁴ Now Philip was from Bethsaida, the city of Andrew and Peter. ⁴⁵ Philip found Nathanael and said to him, "We have found Him of whom Moses in the law, and also the prophets, wrote—Jesus of Nazareth, the son of Joseph." ⁴⁶ And Nathanael said to him, "Can anything good come out of Nazareth?" Philip said to him, "Come and see." ⁴⁷ Jesus saw Nathanael coming toward Him, and said of him, "Behold, an Israelite indeed, in whom is no deceit!" ⁴⁸ Nathanael said to Him, "How do You know me?" Jesus answered and said to him, "Before Philip called you, when you were under the fig tree, I saw you." ⁴⁹ Nathanael answered and said to Him, "Rabbi, You are the Son of God! You are the King of Israel!" ⁵⁰ Jesus answered and said to him, "Because I said to you, 'I saw you under the fig tree,' do you believe? You will see greater things than these." ⁵¹ And He said to him, "Most assuredly, I say to you, hereafter you shall see heaven open, and the angels of God ascending and descending upon the Son of Man" (John 1.43-51).

What these verses reveal is that the content of faith was the belief that Jesus was the promised Messiah, the King of Israel (hence the kingdom message). That is to say, they believed in the *identity* of Jesus—that He was the Messiah, the Son of God.

When Phillip encountered the Ethiopian eunuch in Acts 8, the

eunuch was leaving Jerusalem on his way back to Ethiopia. As he traveled, he was reading Isaiah 53. Phillip saw him reading and the Holy Spirit prompted him to approach his chariot. The Ethiopian asked Phillip regarding the passage he was reading if the prophet spoke of himself or another. According to Luke:

*³⁵ Then Philip opened his mouth, and beginning from this Scripture he preached Jesus to him. ³⁶ As they went along the road they came to some water; and the eunuch *said, "Look! Water! What prevents me from being baptized?" ³⁷ [And Philip said, "If you believe with all your heart, you may." And he answered and said, "I believe that Jesus Christ is the Son of God."]¹ ³⁸ And he ordered the chariot to stop; and they both went down into the water, Philip as well as the eunuch, and he baptized him (Acts 8.35-38).*

After Saul was converted on the road to Damascus he went to the house of Judas where he stayed until he recovered from blindness and the shock of his ordeal. Luke recorded:

¹⁸ And immediately there fell from his eyes something like scales, and he regained his sight, and he got up and was baptized; ¹⁹ and he took food and was strengthened. Now for several days he was with the disciples who were at Damascus, ²⁰ and immediately he began to proclaim Jesus in the synagogues, saying, "He is the Son of God" (Acts 9.18-20).

Paul was saved under the kingdom gospel. As a result, he preached this gospel—that Jesus was the Son of God (Acts 9.20). Not until later did Paul receive a new gospel (foreign to the Twelve) from the ascended Lord. Paul's gospel focused on Christ's *work*—that Christ died for our sins and arose from the dead—not upon His *identity* (1 Corinthians 15.1-4). This is why Paul called this gospel, "my gospel" (Romans 2.16, 16.25;

2 Timothy 2.8).

The Fulfillment of the Gospel of the Kingdom

We have numerous statements from the Scriptures—from the lips of John the Baptizer and Jesus that the kingdom of God was near (Matthew 3.2; Matthew 4.17; Mark 1.15).

²⁸ But if I cast out demons by the Spirit of God, then the kingdom of God has come upon you. ²⁹ Or how can anyone enter the strong man's house and carry off his property, unless he first binds the strong man? And then he will plunder his house (Matthew 12.28-29).

In the above passage, Jesus made it clear the kingdom was present because he was casting out demons by the Holy Spirit. Did he mean that the kingdom was present in some sort of spiritual manifestation? Such a view would contradict hundreds of Biblical passages. But God is not the author of confusion (1 Corinthians 14.33). Therefore, Jesus meant something different.

In order to understand Jesus' words, we have to understand Jewish thinking about the kingdom. For hundreds of years, God had revealed to the Jewish prophets about a coming kingdom. It was earthly—not heavenly or “spiritual.”² In that kingdom, the Messiah would reign as king over national Israel as well as over the entire world (Luke 1.32 cf. 1.67-79; Zechariah 14.9). Most essentially, the kingdom was where the King was.

In the following passage Luke made the same point. However, this passage has been so misunderstood and abused by theologians and preachers that its normal sense has become almost unintelligible. The result is massive confusion.

²⁰ 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; ²¹ nor will they say, 'Look, here it is!' or, 'There it is!' For behold, the kingdom of God is in your midst." (Luke 17.20-21).

The question by the Pharisees was straightforward. They wanted to know when the prophesied kingdom was coming. How did Jesus' respond? The translation above can be improved. The Greek text reads as follows:

Οὐκ ἔρχεται ἡ βασιλεία τοῦ θεοῦ μετὰ παρατηρήσεως

A better translation is, "the kingdom of God is not coming with close watching." Did Jesus mean this kingdom could not be seen—that it was invisible? Hardly. Jesus was being purposefully cryptic. These Pharisees did not want the truth. Their interest was to find something they could use to condemn Jesus. He knew it and this explains His response. Why did Jesus begin to teach in parables? He changed from straightforward instruction to parables for one primary reason: to hide the spiritual lesson from those who wished to remain spiritually blind (Matthew 13.10-17). Jesus's answer to these Pharisees was that one did not need to strain one's eyes to see the kingdom. It did not require "attentive watching," "close observation," or "intense scrutiny." The next passage supports this meaning. It reads,

οὐδὲ ἑροῦσιν ἰδοὺ ὧδε ἢ ἐκεῖ ἰδοὺ γὰρ ἡ βασιλεία τοῦ θεοῦ ἐντὸς ὑμῶν ἐστίν

What did Jesus mean by the phrase ἐντὸς ὑμῶν? Translations that read, "within you" and interpret the phrase as "within one's heart" miss the point as well as the purpose of Jesus' ministry and claims. The phrase "within you" does not mean "within your heart" but "within your midst" or "among you." The central point of the kingdom is it is where the King is. The kingdom of God was certainly not in the heart of these

Pharisees. They hated Him and wished to discredit and destroy Him. Most miss Luke's sarcasm in this passage. Luke was pointing out that the kingdom was in their midst—in the person of the King. No eye strain was required to see the kingdom—He and it was standing right in front of them!

⁸ Whatever city you enter and they receive you, eat what is set before you; ⁹ and heal those in it who are sick, and say to them, 'The kingdom of God has come near to you.' ¹⁰ But whatever city you enter and they do not receive you, go out into its streets and say, ¹¹ 'Even the dust of your city which clings to our feet we wipe off in protest against you; yet be sure of this, that the kingdom of God has come near' (Luke 10.8-11).

The above passage shows once more that the kingdom had come near. But what then? His disciples wondered as much also. Matthew recorded,

As He was sitting on the Mount of Olives, the disciples came to Him privately, saying, "Tell us, when will these things happen, and what will be the sign of Your coming, and of the end of the age?" (Matthew 24.3)

In Matthew 24, Jesus gave his great dissertation about end times to His disciples' questions. In His reply, Jesus made this statement about the gospel of the kingdom:

This gospel of the kingdom shall be preached in the whole world as a testimony to all the nations, and then the end will come (Matthew 24.14).

The central message of the gospel of the kingdom was that God was about to establish His kingdom earth. In this kingdom, the Messiah would reign as David's greater Son. Israel's

covenants—Abrahamic, Land, Sabbatic, Davidic, and New—would be fulfilled. The verses preceding Jesus' statement about the gospel of the kingdom indicated great turmoil—deceit, false messiahs, wars, persecution, betrayal, and lawlessness. Jesus declared that the one who endured until the end will be saved. This salvation was not only spiritual salvation (salvation from sin) but physical salvation. If one survived this terrible time he would live (be saved) and go into the kingdom.

The gospel of the kingdom is synonymous with what has become known as "the great commission."³ In Matthew 28.18-20, gave his disciples the below charge. Matthew recorded:

¹⁸ And Jesus came up and spoke to them, saying, "All authority has been given to Me in heaven and on earth. ¹⁹ Go therefore and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit, ²⁰ teaching them to observe all that I commanded you; and lo, I am with you always, even to the end of the age."

Jesus told his disciples that he would be with them even to the end of the age. Obviously, the "end of the age" has not come. Therefore, Jesus was speaking of Jews who would trust in Him. A future generation of Jews will believe in Jesus as the Messiah (in His identity) and will fulfill the "great commission" by proclaiming the gospel of the kingdom to the entire world. After this occurs the end will come.

The Church's (the body of Christ) "great commission" is the "gospel of the grace of God" not the "gospel of the kingdom." We will not complete the "great commission" because we cannot. The Church is under different orders. God saved and commissioned Paul to be the "apostle to the Gentiles" (Romans 11.13; Galatians 2.8; 1 Timothy 2.7) and gave him the "gospel of the grace of God" (1 Corinthians 15.1-4). The Church's

“great commission” is not the gospel of the kingdom or Matthew 28.18-20. The Church’s “great commission” is 2 Corinthians 5.17-21.

Conclusion

The “gospel of the kingdom” was proclaimed by John the Baptizer, Jesus, and the Twelve. It was the “good news” of the coming kingdom and required repentance, baptism, and faith that Jesus was the prophesied Messiah. It was proclaimed by Jews to Jews only (with a couple of exception such as the Canaanite woman (Matthew 15.21-28) and the Roman centurion (Matthew 8.5-13). This gospel failed due to Jewish unbelief. But God will reinstate it after He completes the Church, the body of Christ (at the Rapture). A future generation of Jews (John 10.16) will embrace and believe it and fulfill Romans 11.26. In the meantime, our gospel is the “gospel of the grace of God” (Acts 20.24; 1 Corinthians 15.1-4).

¹ Most early manuscripts do not contain the verse in brackets (v. 37). While the verse may be an addition, it lines up with the other Scriptures examined in the gospels and what Paul preached following his salvation.

² The phrase “kingdom of heaven” is unique to Matthew and used in the following verses: Matthew 3.2, 4.17, 5.3, 10, 19-20, 6.10, 7.21, 8.11, 10.7, 11.11-12, 13.11, 24. The phrase “kingdom of heaven” is a genitive of source which means that the source of the kingdom was from heaven. It is not a locative genitive (i.e., the kingdom is not located in heaven) or a descriptive genitive (“heavenly” as in a state of mind).

³ See [The Great Commission](#).

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