

THE GOSPEL OF THE KINGDOM

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Most of us, having been in the move of the Spirit for some time now, have become very familiar with the term “gospel of the kingdom.” However, familiarity with something can sometimes prevent us from developing a true understanding and full appreciation of a particular thing. Think for a moment how you might answer the question, “What is the gospel of the kingdom?” We know that “gospel” means “good news” and a kingdom is the domain or sphere of a king. In the context of Christianity, the gospel of the kingdom could be defined as “the good news concerning all the aspects of the domain where God is king. Although that might be an accurate definition, it still is not particularly helpful in allowing us to gain that true understanding and full appreciation of it so that it becomes a motivating factor in our daily lives.

For most Christians, particularly in the western world, the concept of the kingdom means simply the entire body of people who have responded to the grace of God offered in His Son Christ Jesus through His atoning death on the cross. To others, it refers to that future age when Christ returns and sets up His sovereign rule in what has been referred to as the “millennial kingdom.” These views are absolutely valid but are still inadequate in revealing the true reality of the kingdom that so inspired the first century Christians and which should inspire us as Christians in the 21st century. Far be it from me to suggest that I have a complete

understanding and appreciation of the kingdom of God, but I would like to share a few scriptural observations that have at least been helpful in expanding my understanding.

In the very first two chapters of Genesis, we read, “*And God said, Let us make man in our image, after our likeness: and let them have dominion over the fish of the sea, and over the fowl of the air, and over the cattle, and over all the earth, and over every creeping thing that creepeth upon the earth. So God created man in his own image, in the image of God created he him; male and female created he them. And God blessed them, and God said unto them, Be fruitful and multiply, and replenish the earth, and subdue it: and have dominion over the fish of the sea, and over the fowl of the air; and over every living thing that moveth upon the earth*” (Gen. 1:26-28, KJV). Then the Lord God took the man and put him in the garden of Eden to tend and keep it. And the Lord God commanded the man, saying, “*Of every tree of the garden you may freely eat; but of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil you shall not eat, for in the day that you eat of it you shall surely die*” (Genesis 2:15-17, NKJV).

In these two passages of scripture, we learn two important things; God has great plans for what He wants to do in the earth which He has created, and He plans to delegate significant authority to

man concerning its oversight. However, God will still maintain the ultimate authority and rulership over the earth including man. Because of his rebellion to God's ultimate authority, man proved himself to be unqualified to fulfill his part of God's plan. Undeterred in His plan for the earth, God called Abram. In Genesis 12 we read, "Now the Lord had said unto Abram, *Get thee out of thy country, and from thy kindred, and from thy father's house, unto a land that I will shew thee: And I will make of thee a great nation, and I will bless thee, and make thy name great; and thou shalt be a blessing: And I will bless them that bless thee, and curse him that curseth thee: and in thee shall all families of the earth be blessed*" (Genesis 12:1-3, KJV). Here we see, reinforced again, God's intention to do wonderful things on the earth in blessing all the nations of the earth through Abram's descendants. Even though man had proved to be a disappointment along the way, God did not become discouraged. What God sets His mind to do, He will accomplish. This should be a great source of encouragement for us. God, through Abram, chose Israel to be the "flagship," the example to all the nations of the earth of what God could accomplish through a people whose God is the Lord. "But you, Israel, are My servant, Jacob whom I have chosen, The descendants of Abraham My friend. You whom I have taken from the ends of the earth and called from its farthest regions, and said to you, 'You are My servant, I have chosen you and have not cast you away. Fear not, for I am with you; Be not dismayed, for I am your God. I will strengthen you, Yes, I will help you, I will uphold you with My righteous right hand'" (Isaiah 41:8-10, NKJV).

Of course, we know that Israel, as a nation, through their disobedience, also proved themselves unqualified for the vocation to which God had called them. Therefore, in Isaiah, chapter 42, we see what God had known all along. He would call One from Israel who would be Israel's representative, Who alone, on the basis of a sinless life, would fulfill the vocation that Israel, as a whole, could not fulfill. In doing so, He would also call the Gentiles into His light. In Isaiah 42 and 49 we read, "Behold! My Servant whom I uphold, My Elect One in whom My soul delights! I have put My Spirit upon Him; He will bring forth justice to the Gentiles. He will not cry out, nor raise His voice, nor cause His voice to be heard in the street. A bruised reed He will not break, And smoking flax He will not quench; He will bring forth justice for truth. **He will not fail nor be discouraged, till He has established justice in the earth; and the coastlands shall wait for His law**" (Isaiah 42:1-4, NKJV). "Indeed He says, 'It is too small a thing that You should be My Servant to raise up the tribes of Jacob, and to restore the preserved ones of Israel; **I will also give You as a light to the Gentiles, that You should be My salvation to the ends of the earth**'" (Isaiah 49:6, NKJV).

Finally, we begin to see what God knew all along and what He had planned before He laid the foundations of the world. God had and remains to have great plans for the earth, but it begins with His Anointed One, the Messiah of Israel, His only begotten Son, Jesus. However, before God could continue with His plans, He would have to deal with the problem of man's sin. Isaiah, in chapter 53, describes how Jesus would deal with that problem. "Surely He has borne our griefs And carried our sorrows; yet we esteemed Him stricken, smitten by God, and afflicted, but He was wounded for our transgressions, He was bruised for our iniquities. The chastisement for our peace was upon Him, and

by His stripes we are healed. All we like sheep have gone astray; we have turned, every one, to his own way, and the Lord has laid on Him the iniquity of us all. He was oppressed, and He was afflicted. Yet He opened not His mouth. He was led as a lamb to the slaughter; and as a sheep before its shearers is silent, so He opened not His mouth" (Isaiah 53:5-7, NKJV).

For so many Christians today, the plan of God, for all practical purposes, stops with the atonement described so beautifully in the passage above. For many, if they can have their sins forgiven, have the guilt of sin lifted from their shoulders, and promised an eternal home in heaven, they are satisfied. Let me hasten to say, these are no small things which through the infinite grace of God, have been gifted to us who believe on His Name. What so many have failed to see is that God has saved us so that we might participate with Him in fulfilling the great plan He has for the earth. Has God saved us to be whisked out of this broken world and deposited into heaven never to dirty our hands again with the filth of the earth? No, a thousand times, no! Our salvation has not been for the purpose of taking us **from** the world but to prepare us **for** the world. This is where the gospel of the kingdom comes in. For the remainder of this article, I want to talk about the kingdom.

Of course, the term, *kingdom*, implies the existence of a *king*, and it is apparent that the kingdom that God has in mind is to extend to the earth. Psalm 2 does a wonderful job of describing what we see when we look out our window today and how God plans to deal with the situation. "You are wondering: What has provoked the nations to embrace anger and chaos? Why are the people making plans to pursue their own vacant and empty greatness? Leaders of nations stand united, rulers put their heads together, plotting against the Eternal One and His Anointed King, trying to figure out how they can throw off the gentle reign of God's love, step out from under the restrictions of His claims to advance their own schemes. At first, the Power of heaven laughs at their silliness. The Eternal mocks their ignorant selfishness. But His laughter turns to rage, and He rebukes them. As God displays His righteous anger, they begin to know the meaning of fear. He says, **'I am the One who appointed My king who reigns from Zion, My mount of holiness. He is the one in charge.'** I am telling all of you the truth. I have heard the Eternal's decree. He said clearly to me, 'You are My Son. Today I have become your Father. The nations shall be yours for the asking, and the entire earth will belong to you. They are Yours to crush with an iron scepter, Yours to shatter like fragile, clay pots.' So leaders, kings, and judges, be wise, and be warned. There is only one God, the Eternal; worship Him with respect and awe; take delight in Him and tremble. Bow down before God's Son. If you don't, you will face His anger and retribution, And you won't stand a chance. For it doesn't take long to kindle royal wrath, but blessings await all who trust in Him. They will find God a gentle refuge" (Psalm 2, VOICE).

Psalm 2 not only describes the attitudes of the Jewish rulers and the Gentile nations at the time of the crucifixion of Jesus (see Acts 4:25-28) but it describes the environment among kings and rulers of nations on the earth today. God makes it clear that His Anointed One, My King (vs 6) will rule the nations of the earth as their King. He also issues a warning for those who resist His rule and offers a gentle refuge for those who will submit. His kingdom is not meant for the heavenlies only but also for the earth.

When Jesus began His public ministry, He did so by announcing that the kingdom of heaven was at hand (see Matthew 4:17). In fact, He stated clearly that His purpose for coming to earth was to preach the kingdom of God. *"I must preach the kingdom of God to the other cities also, because for this purpose I have been sent (Luke 4:43, NKJV).* In the Sermon on the Mount as recorded in Matthew 5-7, He taught the principles of that kingdom. In John 4, Jesus did not even wait for Nicodemus, a ruler of the Jews, to get around to asking his question before Jesus interrupted him and said, *"Most assuredly, I say to you, unless one is born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God" (John 3:3, NKJV).* Jesus went further in verse 5 to say, *"Most assuredly, I say to you, unless one is born of water and the Spirit, he cannot enter the kingdom of God."* Jesus knew that what Nicodemus needed to see, as a ruler and teacher of the Jews, was the truth and the reality of the kingdom of God, but to see it and then enter it, he would have to have his spirit made alive and his spiritual eyes opened by the new birth. It is no different for us today. *"Once, on being asked by the Pharisees when the kingdom of God would come, Jesus replied, 'The coming of the kingdom of God is not something that can be observed, nor will people say, 'Here it is,' or 'There it is,' because the kingdom of God is in your midst'" (Luke 17:20-21, NIVUK).* King Jesus was among them, in their midst. Wherever the King is, there is the kingdom also. When Jesus taught His disciple how to pray, he included this phrase early in the model prayer, *"Your kingdom come, Your will be done, on earth as it is in heaven" (Matthew 6:10, NKJV).*

Why have I included all these scriptures? It is to show how important a part the establishment of the kingdom of God on the earth was to the reason Jesus was sent to earth. However, we must remember that Jesus did not come to a neutral or benign environment. Satan, along with his angels, had been cast out of heaven to the earth and had set up his own kingdom of darkness on the earth. In order for Christ to establish His kingdom on the earth, He would have to dissolve or undo Satan's power structure, and this He did by going to the cross. *"He who sins is of the devil, for the devil has sinned from the beginning. For this purpose the Son of God was manifested, that He might destroy the works of the devil" (1 John 3:8, NKJV).* In the last few days before Jesus went to the cross, He said this, *"Now is the judgment of this world; now the ruler of this world will be cast out" (John 12:31, NKJV).* *"And when your flesh was still uncircumcised—dead in transgression and swathed in its sinful nature—it was God who brought us to life with Him, forgave all our sins, and eliminated the massive debt we incurred by the law that stood against us. He took it all away; He nailed it to the cross. But that's not all. He disarmed those who once ruled over us—those who had overpowered us. Like captives of war, He put them on display to the world to show His victory over them by means of the cross (Colossian 2:13-15, VOICE).* Finally, God's promise given in Genesis 3:15 had come to pass, *"He shall bruise your head."*

I think it is important to consider the contrasting differences in the structures of Satan's kingdom and the kingdom of God, particularly in their foundational principles. The key difference is revealed so clearly in Jesus' interrogation by Pilate prior to His crucifixion. *"Pilate answered, 'Am I a Jew? Your own nation and the chief priests have delivered You to me. What have You done?'" Jesus answered, 'My kingdom is not of this world. If My kingdom*

were of this world, My servants would fight, so that I should not be delivered to the Jews; but now My kingdom is not from here.' Pilate therefore said to Him, 'Are You a king then?'" Jesus answered, 'You say rightly that I am a king. For this cause I was born, and for this cause I have come into the world, that I should bear witness to the truth. Everyone who is of the truth hears My voice'" (John 18:35-37, NKJV). Some would say that when Jesus said, *"My kingdom is not of this world,"* He was saying that His kingdom was a spiritual kingdom meant for another realm. I do not believe that is what He meant. His kingdom is absolutely for this world, but not just an improved version of what already exists. It is based on a totally different foundational principle than the kingdoms of the world. The power of His kingdom would not come into being through a lust for power nor would it be maintained through human power or military strength but by the power of sacrificial love. Satan was cast out of heaven because of his sin, his rebellion to God's authority. He established his kingdom on earth on the same principles of sin and death. Praise God, Jesus broke Satan's power through His death on the cross, and now the power of sin over us has been broken. *"And you He made alive, who were dead in trespasses and sins, in which you once walked according to the course of this world, according to the prince of the power of the air, the spirit who now works in the sons of disobedience" (Ephesians 2:1-2, NKJV).*

I think it was Watchman Nee who likened Satan's continued influence in the world to a world leader who has been defeated and whose previous authority has been officially dissolved and undone but who now resorts to guerilla warfare to harass the new, legitimate regime. I must admit that I am perplexed at times at how much noise Satan is allowed to continue to make and how much grief he continues to cause given that he is a defeated foe. However, God has His reasons for allowing him the degree of freedom he has to resist the establishment of the kingdom of God on the earth. Jesus told us that His kingdom would not come into its fullness all at once. The parables in Matthew chapter 13 bear that out. Birds still devour the seed of the Word as it is scattered, weeds still prevent fruit from coming forth, tares still grow among the wheat, leaven still permeates the loaf, the net still collects both good and bad fish which must be separated at some point, but soul by soul, Jesus is adding to His kingdom, *"...giving thanks to the Father who has qualified us to be partakers of the inheritance of the saints in the light. He has delivered us from the power of darkness and conveyed us into the kingdom of the Son of His love, in whom we have redemption through His blood, the forgiveness of sins" (Colossian 1:12-14, NKJV).*

This is the gospel of the kingdom. Not only have we been forgiven of our sins and freed from the guilt of those sins and guaranteed eternal life by believing in Christ, but we have been translated out of Satan's kingdom of darkness and into the glorious kingdom of God's Son, Jesus, the Christ, the Anointed One, the King of all creation. We are now citizens of that new kingdom, and we are offered the privilege and the responsibility to participate in its building. *"And here is the staggering thing—that in all which will one day belong to Him we have been promised a share (since we were long ago destined for this by the One who achieves His purposes by His sovereign will), so that we, as the first to put our confidence in Christ, may bring praise to His glory! And you too trusted Him, when you heard the message of truth, the Gospel of*

your salvation. And after you gave your confidence to Him you were, so to speak, stamped with the promised Holy Spirit as a guarantee of purchase, until the day when God completes the redemption of what He has paid for as His own; and that will again be to the praise of His glory” (Ephesians 1:11-14, PHILLIPS).

We know how the story ends, but the end is not yet. The passage of scripture in Luke 19:11-27 describes exactly where we are today. To save space, I will not include the entire passage in this article, but I encourage you to read it. I think it is safe to say that in the parable the nobleman who has received a kingdom is Jesus and the One who is going to return (vs12). His citizens who hate Him and say that they refuse to have Him reign over them are those described in Matthew chapter 13 who are in the realm of the kingdom but are not of the kingdom (vs 14). His ten servants represent us, and this is what he commands us, *“Do business till I come”* (vs 12b, NKJV). Diligently occupy yourselves in doing kingdom business until I return.

Just as the nobleman gave each of his servants a pound with which to trade for gain while he was gone, so Jesus gives each of us spiritual gifts and even natural abilities which He can sanctify for His service with which we are to do kingdom business until He returns. One thing that as servants we must remember is that we serve His kingdom as members of a body, not as a disjointed group of independent members. Therefore, unity is absolutely critical. *“For as the body is one and has many members, but all the members of that one body, being many, are one body, so also is Christ. For by one Spirit we were all baptized into one body—whether Jews or Greeks, whether slaves or free—and have all been made to drink into one Spirit. For in fact the body is not one member but many”* (1 Corinthians 12:12-14, NKJV). Almost everyone knows that in any enterprise, unity is critical to success. Literally, thousands of books have been written about the criticality of unity to success in industry, the military, sports teams, service organizations, marriages, etc., and still, it manages to elude most. God invented the concept of unity and demonstrated its success in the triune Godhead. There has always been perfect unity among the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit, each person of the Trinity having His own responsibility in carrying out the plan of God and each submitting one to another. God now intends for that model to be manifested in the church, the body of Christ.

As I thought about this passage of scripture, it dawned on me the differences in background, culture, education, privilege, economic advantage, etc. that were bound to have existed between Jews and Greeks and slaves and free men. What was it that placed them all together on common ground? It was the Holy Spirit. They were all immersed in the one Holy Spirit, the Great Equalizer. The same is true for us today. Forgive me for being somewhat presumptuous, but please allow me to paraphrase the above scripture to put it into the context of today:

*“For as the body is one and has many members, but all the members of that one body, being many, are one body, so also is Christ. For by one Spirit we were all baptized into one body - whether conservatives or liberals, democrats or republicans, vaccinated or unvaccinated, vaxers or non-vaxers, maskers or non-maskers - and have all been made to drink into one Spirit. **For in fact, the body is not one member but many.”***

“Beloved, let us love one another, for love is of God; and everyone who loves is born of God and knows God. He who does not love does not know God, for God is love” (1 John 4:7-8, NKJV).

Dear saints of God, may we not allow insignificant differences among us as members of the body of Christ to prevent us from entering the kingdom of God. God forbid that we would be like Esau who gave up his birthright for a bowl of beans. Let Christ be our example of how to love one another with sacrificial love. Let us be willing to give up our little kingdom of “one” that we might be a contributing citizen of the kingdom of the Son of God’s love. †

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SHARON STAR

The Sharon Star is a monthly publication and mailed as a free-will offering plan. The articles within are intended for inspiration and information to those who are interested in the unfolding revelation of the Word of God.

Published by:
Global Missions Inc. in North Battleford,
Saskatchewan, Canada.

The Sharon Star is found online at:
www.globalmissionsinc.org/sharon-star

Publications Mail Agreement 40012206

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