

LIVING WATERS NEWSLETTER

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THE NEGLECTED GOSPEL OF THE KINGDOM

In the July issue of *Living Waters Newsletter* we quoted Joyce Baldwin's statement from *Tyndale's Old Testament Commentary* in these words: "The church has lost its nerve. An earthbound rationalistic humanism has invaded Christian thinking as to tinge with faint ridicule all claims to see in the Bible anything more than the vaguest reference to future events." We applied these words to the subject of covenant. We now apply them to their original intent: The gospel of the kingdom of God. Somehow the church has either neglected or lost, if they ever had it, the Biblical message of the kingdom of God, which was the central message of Jesus and the Apostles.

In spite of the fact that the religious world has ignored, neglected, and disregarded the central teaching of Jesus and the Apostles on the subject of the kingdom, and made the kingdom of God the church and went riding off in all directions giving their attention to every issue except the kingdom of God, there has been a few who have ignored the religious babble that fills our Seminaries and Bible colleges and seeps into our pulpits, and is pointing the church back to the kingdom. We will list a few examples.

Dr. Charles Tabor, Professor Emeritus of World Missions, Emmanuel School of Evangelism, Tennessee, wrote in a letter to *Christianity Today*: "I read with great interest the nine statements in *Christianity Today* attempting to answer the question, 'What is the Good News?' I am amazed and dismayed to find not even a passing mention of the theme which was the core of Jesus' ministry in three of the four accounts: *The Kingdom of God*. Every one of these statements reflects the individualistic reduction of the Gospel that plagues American evangelicalism."

Tom Sine in *The Mustard Seed Conspiracy* wrote: "The victory of the future of God was the central theme of the ministry of Jesus. Michael Green asked during the Lausanne International Conference on World Evangelization in 1974, 'How much have you heard here about the Kingdom of God? Not much. It is not our language. But it was Jesus' prime concern.'"

Dr. Howard Marshall of the University of Aberdeen wrote in *The Expository Times*: "During the past sixteen years I can recollect only two occasions on which I have heard sermons specifically devoted to the theme of the kingdom of God. I find this silence rather surprising because the central theme of the teaching of Jesus was the kingdom of God." How much of the kingdom of God is being preached today?

Peter Wagner, the high priest of the church growth movement, wrote in his book, *Church Growth and the Whole Gospel*: "I cannot help wondering out loud why I haven't heard more about the kingdom of God in the thirty years I have been a Christian. I have certainly read about it in the Bible. Matthew mentions the Kingdom 52 times, Mark 19 times, Luke 44 times, John 4 times. But I cannot honestly remember any pastor whose ministry I have been under actually preaching a sermon on the Kingdom of God. As I rummage through my own sermon barrel, I now realize that I myself never preached a sermon on it."

In his book *They Never Taught Me This in Church* Greg Deuble wrote: "This historical fact is often lost sight of in discussions concerning Jesus' execution. Jesus did not die because he preached 'the kingdom of God is within you' (Luke 17:21), meaning God's peace rules in your hearts as a spiritual reality. That message was not offensive then, and it is still not offensive today. Lots of folks today talk easily about their 'spiritual journey' and their life of 'faith in God.' Nobody bats an eyelid. But let the true believer in the Jewish Messiah announce that Christ will yet rule the governments and nations of this world, and all powers and authorities will bow before him, and see the kind of reaction it inevitably engenders!"

Noted British Author H.G. Wells, not known for his Christianity, wrote in *The Outline of History*: "As remarkable is the enormous prominence given by Jesus to teaching of the Kingdom of Heaven, and its comparative insignificance in the procedure and teaching of most Christian churches. The doctrine of the Kingdom of Heaven, which was the main teaching of Jesus, and which and plays so small a part in the Christian creeds, is certainly one of the most revolutionary doctrines that ever stirred and changed human thought. The doctrine of the Kingdom, as Jesus preached it, was no less than a bold and uncompromising demand for a complete change and cleansing of the life of our struggling race, an utter cleansing without and within." It seems this worldly-minded author had a greater grasp of the Biblical teaching concerning the Kingdom than most modern well-known prestigious commentary writers and teachers of modern preachers and churches throughout Christian history.

E. Stanly Jones in his book *The Unchangeable Kingdom and the Unchanging Person* noted this concerning H. G. Wells: "Listen to the considered conclusion of historian H.G. Wells, who when fumbling through history in search of the relevant came across the fact of the Kingdom of God and was shocked as by an electric shock: 'Why here is the most radical proposal ever presented to the mind of man, the proposal to replace the present world order with God's order, the Kingdom of God.'" We continue with the following quote by E. Stanly Jones (*Ibid*). "If Jesus made the kingdom of God the center of his message and the center of his endeavor, the greatest need of man is to rediscover the kingdom of God."

In his book *From Eternity to Eternity*, Eric Sauer states: "The royal Sovereignty (Kingdom) of God is the chief content of the whole Biblical historical revelation. All the mighty developments in the realm of the Divine, human, and Satanic belong to the history of the kingdom of God. The Kingdom is the real basic theme of the Bible. It is the surrounding historical frame in which the whole course of revelation is being consummated. All ages and periods of Divinity revealed ways; all groups and persons addressed, whether Israel, the nations or the church; all temples, sanctuaries, and redeeming acts; all heavenly and demonic activities, whether in the foreground or background, stand in some way, either positivity or negatively, in connection with the history of the kingdom of God. The kingdom itself is the royal saving work of God to the carrying through of His counsels in creation and redemption."

The first reference to *the Kingdom of God* involving the people of God is found in Exodus 19:5, 6: “Now then, if you will obey My voice and keep My covenant, then you shall be My own possession among all the peoples, for all the earth is Mine; and you shall be to Me *a kingdom of priests and a holy nation.*” Being a covenantal people, as a kingdom of priests, Israel would exercise a priestly ministry of instruction and intercession on behalf of the nations of the world. However, Israel did not live up to their covenantal position and controversially, Paul stated: “The name of God is blasphemed among the Gentiles because of you, just as it is written.” This is further verified by Jesus in Matthew 21:43 “Therefore I say to you, *the kingdom of God* will be taken from you and given to a people producing the fruit of it.” Of the Christian it is said, “You are a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people for God’s own possession, so that you may proclaim the excellencies of Him who called you out of darkness into His marvelous light” (I Pet.2:9). The Kingdom in the Old Testament that Israel rejected has become the hope and the inheritance of the believer.

The term “kingdom of God” does not appear in the Old Testament, however, the rule of God over His creation, over all creatures, over the kingdoms of the world, and over His chosen people, Israel, is the heart of the Hebrew Scriptures. British scholar G.R. Beasley-Murray in his book *Jesus and the Kingdom of God* wrote: “When Yahweh comes to bring *His kingdom*, it is to this world that He establishes His reign. The hope of Israel was not for a home in heaven but for the revelation of the glory of God in this world, when ‘the earth shall be full of the knowledge of the Lord as the waters cover the sea’ (Hab.2:14). A time was to come when men should learn that the kingdom of God that comes embraces the world and the cosmos and the ages of ages, that in the kingdom the individual has a meaningful place in redeemed mankind, and the center of all stands the throne of God and the Lamb. Such a vision is beyond the horizon of the Old Testament, but it stands in the line of its development. It is sufficient for us to observe the harmony of the hope of God’s anointed in it, and to know that both are the result of the coming of the Lord for the salvation of the world.”

What the Old Testament prophets say concerning the *kingdom of God* is that the *kingdom of God* will be established throughout the world and the Messiah, along with the saints will establish his rule throughout the world administering an ideal world government. It is amazing to note how many times the New Testament references the Old Testament and the words of the prophets. The first thing said about Jesus, even before his birth; was a reference to O.T. prophecy: “The Lord God will give him the throne of his father David and he will reign over the house of Jacob forever; and *his Kingdom* will have no end” (Luke 1:32, 33). Later he spoke to the two on the Emmaus Road: “These are the words which I spoke to you while I was with you, that all things which are written about me in the Law of Moses and the Prophets, and the Psalms must be fulfilled” (Luke 24:44). Even after spending three and a half years with him, he spent forty days after resurrection with his disciples “speaking of things concerning *the kingdom of God*” (Acts 1:3) When Peter preached the first sermon after the ascension of Christ, he quoted verbatim the prophet Joel to explain the phenomena of Pentecost that day, (Acts 2:16-20, Joel 28-32) and cited Psalm 16:8-11, and Psalm 110:1 to prove his resurrection and ascension (Acts:2:25-35). To his Jewish audience Peter again quotes “His holy prophets” (Acts 3:21-24, Deut. 18:18,19). On his first missionary journey the Apostle Paul preached to a Jewish audience and quoted from Psalms 89:20, 2, and 16:10, ending his sermon with Habakkuk 1:5 and Isaiah 42:6, 49:6. (Acts 13). Paul’s defense before Felix in Acts 24 was: “I do serve the God of our fathers,

believing everything that is in accordance with Law and that is written in the Prophets” (ver.14). Speaking before King Agrippa Paul stated: “I stand to this day testifying stating nothing but what the Prophets and Moses said was going to take place” (Acts 26:22). In ver. 27 Paul asked, “King Agrippa, do you believe the prophets?” The question the modern church should be asked is not only “do you believe the prophets?” but “have you ever heard the prophets preached or ever mentioned in today’s pulpits?”

Acts 28:23 Paul was speaking to “the leading men of the Jews” (ver. 17) “explaining to them by solemnly testifying about *the kingdom of God* and trying to persuade them concerning Jesus, from both the Law of Moses and the Prophets.” When they did not believe him, he quoted Isaiah 6:9 and 10 and concluded: “...this salvation of God has been sent to the Gentiles, they will listen.” Paul continued proclaiming *the Kingdom of God* and teaching concerning the Lord Jesus Christ with openness, unhindered.” (vers. 28-30). The Apostle Peter has written of the prophets who prophesied: “...As to salvation, the prophets who prophesied of the grace that would come to you made careful searches and inquiries seeking to know what person or time the Spirit of Christ within them was indicating as he predicted the sufferings of Christ and the glories to follow, It was revealed to them that they were not serving themselves, but you, in these things that have been announced to you through those who preached the gospel to you by the Holy Spirit sent from heaven, things in which angels desire to look” (I Pet. 1:10-12). This passage tells us the prophets did not know the full story about the sufferings of Christ and the glories that would follow so they searched and inquired about them. We wonder what the angels think as they look into some of the shenanigans that pass for preaching today. Just because a man is a “preacher” and preaches sermons does not mean he preaches the word of God. Sermons can be just “beating the air” (I Cor. 9:26) and they can be “believed in vain” (I Cor. 25:2). Paul warns young Timothy to “accurately handle the word of truth” (I Tim. 2:15). Concerning his preaching the Apostle Paul states: “Woe is me if I preach not the gospel (I Cor. 9:6). The gospel Paul preached was the gospel of the kingdom (Acts 19:8, 20:24-27).

Thayer’s Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament defines the Greek word for preaching as “To proclaim glad tidings: spec. to instruct (men) concerning the things of salvation...used of glad tidings concerning *the kingdom of God*, and the salvation attained through Christ...to announce the glad tidings of the Messiah, or of *the kingdom of God.*” Kittel’s *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament* further defines the word preaching as “Not a lecture on God’s kingdom, it is the proclamation, the declaration of an event. If Jesus came to preach, this means he was sent to announce *the Kingdom of God* and therewith to bring it into being. Other items of content mentioned, *there is remission of sins in the Kingdom.* The word proclaimed is a divine word, and as such it is an effective force which creates what it proclaims. Hence preaching is no mere impartation of facts, it is an event. What is proclaimed takes place. The proclamation of Jesus is more than a historical instruction concerning the words and acts of Jesus. Stories about Jesus, however edifying, are of themselves empty. If they are not understood in the light of faith, they are simply stories that happened in the past and are valueless for the present. The reality of *the kingdom* constitutes the fullness of early Christianity.”

The two Greek authorities quoted above connects preaching with the *Kingdom of God*. The gospels and Acts emphasize that the message of Jesus and the Apostles was *The Kingdom of God*. Why is it not the message of the church today?