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HOW THE KINGDOM WAS LOST

Mark 1:14, 15 states “Jesus came into Galilee preaching the gospel of God and saying, ‘The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God is at hand, repent and believe in the Gospel.’” The word gospel means “good news.” So, what was the good news Jesus preached? Salvation from sin, that he would die for the sins of the world. These and other important subjects Jesus certainly taught, but they were not the main thrust of his preaching. Matthew states it this way: “And Jesus was going about in all Galilee, teaching in their synagogues, and proclaiming the gospel of the kingdom” (Matt. 4:23). Further: “Jesus was going throughout all the cities and villages, teaching in their synagogues, and proclaiming the gospel of the kingdom” (Matt. 9:35). In the parable of the Sower the word that was heard was “the gospel of the kingdom” (Matt. 13:19). Jesus said: “And the gospel of the kingdom shall be preached in the world for a witness to all the nations, and then the end shall come” (Matt. 24:14). Luke’s words concerning the multitudes were: “He began speaking to them about the kingdom of God” (Luke 9:11). In fact, Jesus says the reason he was sent was to preach the kingdom: “I must preach the kingdom of God to other cities also, for I was sent for this purpose” (Luke 4:43). After his resurrection Jesus “appeared to them (the Apostles) over a period of forty days, speaking to them of the things concerning the kingdom of God” (Acts 1:3).

If the preaching of Jesus was the kingdom of God, then the preaching in the book of Acts must have been the same message Jesus preached. The Samaritans “believed Philip preaching the good news about the kingdom of God and the name of Jesus Christ” (Acts 8:12). Paul’s preaching contained this same truth: Paul and Barnabas “encouraged the Disciples to continue in the faith, saying, ‘Through many tribulations we must enter the Kingdom of God’” (Acts 14:22). Paul “continued speaking out boldly for three months, reasoning and persuading them about the kingdom of God” (Acts 19:8). On his way to Jerusalem Paul told the elders at Ephesus: “I do not consider my life of any account as dear to myself, in order that I may finish my course, and the ministry which I received from the Lord Jesus, to testify solemnly of the gospel of the grace of God. And now I know that you all, among whom I went about preaching the kingdom, will see my face no more...for I did not shrink from declaring to you the whole purpose of God” (Acts 20:24-27). These verses show that “the gospel of the grace of God” and the “preaching of the kingdom” were the same thing and are summed up in verse 27 as being “the whole purpose of God.” When imprisoned in Rome Paul “testified about and preached the kingdom of God” (Acts 28:23, 31).

These scriptures show one important fact: Jesus and the Apostles were concerned above all with the Gospel of the Kingdom of God, however, in the generations succeeding the Apostles the focus on the kingdom began to decline. The church leadership in the years following the Apostles became known by Biblical historians as *the Church Fathers*. David Bercot in his book *Will the Real Heretics Please Stand Up* states that the writings of these men “primarily consist of apologetic works explaining Christian beliefs to the Romans and Jews; works defending Christianity against heretics; and correspondence between Churches.” This means these men were faithful in preserving important beliefs and practices in spite of the fact that they leave us little about the kingdom of God.

The following are quotes from *A Dictionary of Early Christian Beliefs* concerning the kingdom of God.

“The kingdom of God is within you. Who will not interpret the words ‘within you’ to mean in your hand, within your power? That is, if you hear and do the commandment of God.” *Tertullian*, (207 AD).

“That person is already in the kingdom of the heavens who lives according to the virtues. Accordingly, the saying ‘Repent for the kingdom of heaven is at hand,’ refers to deeds and disposition—not to a certain time. Christ, who is all virtue has come. For this reason he says that the kingdom of God is within his disciples, not out here or there.” *Origen* (245 AD).

“Dearest brethren, Christ himself may be the kingdom of God, whom we day by day desire to come...The kingdom of God may be understood to be Himself, in him we shall reign. But we do well seeking the kingdom of God.” *Cyprian* (250 AD).

“On account of the goodness and faithfulness that he displayed on earth, there was given to him a kingdom, and glory and dominion. This is understood in two ways. First, even now he has an everlasting dominion—when people of all nations and languages adore his name, confess his majesty, and imitate his goodness...Second, when he comes again with majesty and glory to judge, and restore the righteous to life, then he will have dominion over the whole earth.” *Lactantius* (304-313 AD).

Plus: Brian Shawlatter (on the web) *Practical Apologetics*:

“It is a good thing to be in the kingdom of Christ, so that Christ may be with us. Here we are the kingdom of Christ, and in Christ’s kingdom. Hereafter we shall be in the kingdom of God. ‘If my kingdom were of this world my servants would fight, that I should not be delivered to the Jews.’ He undoeth *sic* that which for a while Pilate greatly feared, namely, the suspicion of seizing kingly power.’ Is then his kingdom not of the world also?’ Certainly it is. How then saith he it is not?’ Not because he does not rule here, but because he has his empire from above, and because it is not human, but far greater than this and more splendid.” *Ambrose of Milan* (340-397 AD).

If these quotes are any example of the “church Fathers” then they danced around the kingdom, much like the church fathers today, and never touched the biblical teaching of the kingdom. This is one of the basic reasons the kingdom has become lost, the church has preached everything, much of it necessary, to the neglect of the biblical teaching of the kingdom. Although the theme of the preaching of Jesus and the Apostles was the kingdom, in the years following this message became almost totally absent from preaching and continues to be absent from preaching today. The theme exchanged for the gospel of the kingdom was the gospel of salvation. Jesus never intended that his followers would preach salvation and the new birth apart from the kingdom. The scripture records only one occasion on which Jesus spoke about being born again and spoke of salvation only three or four times, and giving his life as a ransom only once. Understand we are not minimizing the need of hearing about salvation and the new birth, etc. They are crucial aspects of the gospel; however, they are a means to an end,

that is entering the kingdom of God. Jesus spoke of these things, and they were important to him but when they crowd out the kingdom then the kingdom is being lost. The majority of preaching today never mentions the kingdom in light of the Scripture.

The kingdom of God has been lost because of the interpretation of Luke 17:21... "the kingdom of God is within you" (KJV) has been taken to mean "the kingdom is within your heart" that is, "the kingdom is an individual experience now." This could hardly be true since Jesus is speaking, not to believers, but to the Pharisees who were questioning him concerning the coming of the kingdom. Other versions have correctly translated this "behold the kingdom of God is in your midst," meaning, the kingdom of God in the person of the king is standing in your very presence. The works of Jesus demonstrated the presence of the kingdom. This is expressed about the ministry of the Apostles, Luke 10:9-10: "Whatever city you enter...heal the sick and say unto them, 'the kingdom of God has come near to you.'" These scriptures show the kingdom could not be "in your heart."

Greg Deuble in *They Never Told Me This in Church* has the following comment on this verse: "Jesus did not die because he preached 'the kingdom of God is within you' meaning God's peace rules in your hearts as a spiritual reality. That message was not offensive then and is still not offensive today. Lots of folks today talk easily about their 'spiritual experience' and their life of 'faith in God.' Nobody bats an eyelid. But let the believer in the Jewish Messiah announce that Christ will rule the nations of the world, and all the authorities will bow before him, and see the kind of reaction it inevitably engenders!"

Another way the Kingdom has been lost is since the days of Augustine the Kingdom has been identified with the church. The idea was that the church being embarrassed by the failure of the kingdom to come decided to claim the church was indeed the kingdom. This was popular with Roman Catholics as it made the church infallible. P.E. Moore in *The Christ of the New Testament* wrote on this subject: "By making the Church the kingdom commentaries are full of attempts to explain away perfectly clear and concrete statements of prophesy." This has been a popular interpretation by the Protestant churches. To equate the kingdom with the church is to reduce the kingdom to a minor place in Scripture.

It is a popular interpretation that the church is the kingdom. However the word "church" and "kingdom" show that they are not the same thing. The word for church is *ekklesia*, a combination of the words "*ek*" (out of) and "*klesis*" (a calling) meaning "called out". The word "kingdom" is *basileia* and means "reign" or "rule" (II Tim. 2:12). The church is the people of the kingdom but not the kingdom itself. The kingdom is the rule of God; the church is an assembly of His people. The kingdom is not limited to being the church. "For the kingdom is Jehovah's and He rules over the nations" (Psalm 22:28) and "...the Most High is ruler over the realm of mankind, and bestows it on whom He wishes, He sets over it the lowliest of men." (Dan. 4:17). There are many passages that speak of our entering the kingdom that are different than those that speak of entering the church.

George Ladd in *A Theology of the New Testament* sums it up in these words: "While there is an inseparable relationship between the kingdom and the church, they are not to be identified. The kingdom takes its point of departure from God, the church from human beings. The kingdom is God's reign and the realm in which the blessings of his reign are experienced; the church is the fellowship

of those who have experienced God's reign and entered into the enjoyment of its blessings. The kingdom creates the church, works through the church, is proclaimed in the world by the church. There can be no kingdom without the church, those who have acknowledged God's rule, and there can be no church without the God's kingdom; but they remain two distinguishable concepts: the rule of God and fellowship of man."

Another way the kingdom has been lost is it has been taken out of the gospel. It is common today to hear preachers refer to the second chapter of Acts and say that Peter preached the first gospel sermon. This belief is based upon the words of Paul in I Corinthians 15:1-4 when he reminded them of "the gospel which I preached to you." He goes on to say he had preached to them the fact that "Christ died for our sins, according to the Scriptures, and that he was buried, and that he was raised on the third day" (ver.3,4). Upon the bases of these verses we have concluded that the gospel is the good news that Christ died, was buried and rose again. This is indeed "good news" but is by no means all of "The Gospel". In fact the gospel was preached before these events took place. Mark 1:14, 15 states "Jesus came into Galilee preaching the gospel of God and saying, 'The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God is at hand, repent and believe in the Gospel.'" A quote from a Billy Graham Gospel tract written by Roy Gustafson entitled *What is the Gospel?* states the common views about Paul's preaching: "If you read the epistles of Paul you will notice the message centers in three things: the death, the burial, and the resurrection of Christ. As far as Paul was concerned, Christ Jesus came to do three days' work: the work was commenced when he was nailed on the cross and was ended when God raised him from among the dead. Paul never discussed the earthly life of our Lord—his baptism, his temptation, his miracles, his teachings, or even his sufferings in the Garden of Gethsemane. This is quite in keeping with the rest of the New Testament, for we must remember that Christ came not primarily to preach the gospel (though he did herald deliverance to the prisoner), but he came rather that there might be a gospel to preach. This gospel was won and brought into being by his work on the cross." If this tract is true, then the Scriptures that declare Christ preached "the gospel of the Kingdom" are false.

The religious world has been so absorbed with walking the streets of gold with Christ in heaven, they have never considered ruling with him on earth. Consider the following scriptures and keep in mind Romans 8:17 which states that we are "heirs of God and joint heirs of Christ". A joint heir shares everything the heir inherits. If Christ rules the nations of the earth, then we will rule the earth with him. "He who overcomes, and he who keeps my deeds until the end, to him I will give authority over the nations; and he shall rule them with a rod of iron, as the vessels of the potter are broken to pieces, as I also have received authority from my Father" (Rev. 2:26, 27). This is a quotation from Psalm 2:8, 9 and 10 in a prophesy of the son of God: "Ask of Me and I will surely give the nations as thy inheritance, and the very ends of the earth as thy possession. Thou shall break them with a rod of iron, thou shall shatter them like earthenware. Therefore, O kings, show discernment..."

The gospel is more than a message telling us how to get to heaven, rather it is a message concerning the kingdom of God and the part we will play in it. Paul asked the Corinthians: "Do you not know that the saints will judge the world?" and "Do you not know that we shall judge angels?" Not only did the Corinthians not know this, but the church today does also not know it. Most preachers would pass it off as "making no difference to us" because the kingdom has been taken out of the gospel.