

## MISSING LINKS IN THE CHURCH

The phrase “missing link” is defined in the *Wikipedia* encyclopedia as “the fossilized remains of intermediary forms of life that illustrate an evolutionary transition. They can be identified by their retention of certain traits in comparison with more derived relatives.” Translate this into something relative to the church and some of “the forms of life” that is relative to the Christian life, have become “fossilized remains” in many churches, and where the “retention of certain traits” in comparison to what they have “derived” instead of pointing to further development as the evolutionist claims, have basically disappeared. Scientists call this “evolution” churches call it “renewal” and “making the church more relevant”. Reggie McNeal in his book *The Present Future* sums it up in these words: “Although the next church’s shape is not yet obvious, the forces that will give it shape are. An entire industry has been spawned to help churches do whatever it is they decide to do. Consultants, parachurch ministries, denominational headquarters, and publishing houses prod and push the church toward whatever the current fad is. A spate of program fixes have consistently over promised and under delivered. The suggestions are plentiful: offer small groups, contemporize your worship, market your services, focus on customer service, create a spiritual experience, become seeker-friendly, create high-expectation member culture, purify the church from bad doctrine, return the church to the basics. After decades of this kind of environment no wonder church leaders are a little skeptical about the ‘next thing’ and why so many feel that just about the time they catch up they fall further behind. But the mailings keep coming, the seminars keep filling up, and the conference notebooks keep stacking up on the shelves. Church activity is a poor substitute for genuine spiritual vitality.” In this “evolution” from what the Scriptures teach to the modern day relativism of the modern church there are some great truths that have become fossilized and outdated missing links.

One of the missing links in many churches today is the abysmal ignorance and neglect of the Word of God. And even when it is not neglected there is a tendency of many preachers and church members to simply not believe and accept what it actually says. A little known and much neglected passage of Scripture I have referred to many times in writings and sermons is Deuteronomy 29:29: “The secret things belong to the Lord our God, but the things revealed belong to us and our sons forever, that we may observe all the words of the law.” Many Christians read the Bible today with the conviction that its message is wrapped in obscurity and cannot be understood. The word “revealed” means “to uncover, bring to light, and disclosure”. J.A. Seiss, a writer in the last century, stated it well in *The Last Times and the Great Commission*: “One of the strangest things in the world is the manner in which some people read the Bible. It would almost seem as if they turned it upside down and read it backwards. They praise it and hold it in holy regard, and insist that everyone ought to have it; yet they look into it only as some recondite volume, which is a good text book for preachers, but is quite beyond the reach of their understanding. Many writers of

commentaries seem to be continually haunted with the idea there is something mysterious in every word, or that the real mind of the spirit is not to be found in the plain import of the letter, but in some abstruse or mystic analogy which it is their business to dig after.” It was early in the last century that German rationalism was introduced into denominational seminaries which trickled down into the churches by preachers embracing the teaching of their professors who had rejected anything in Scripture that could not be explained upon rational basis. The authority of the Scriptures and anything that could not be explained scientifically or psychologically was blatantly rejected. This kind of thinking flooded churches and became the reason for the rejection of the Word of God for what it actually says and thus became a missing link in many churches. Over fifty years ago J.B. Phillips wrote in *The Young Church in Action* “It is one of the curious phenomena of modern times that it is considered perfectly respectable to be abysmally ignorant of the Christian faith. Men and women who would be deeply ashamed of having their ignorance exposed in matters of poetry, music, ballet or painting, for example are not in the least perturbed to be found ignorant of the New Testament. Very rarely does a man or woman give honest intelligent adult attention the Scriptures and then decide that Jesus was merely a misguided man. The plain fact is not that men have given it their serious attention and found it spurious, but that they have never given it their serious attention at all.” I wonder what he would say today. The modern church seems to be experiencing a “spiritual revolution” in which Biblical faith is being replaced by a hybrid faith mixed with convenient parts of traditional Christianity, secularism, materialism and hedonism. It is a crossless, Spiritless, Scriptural less kind of religion. It knows nothing of real discipleship, church relationships and sacrifice, but is filled with the flavor of feel good personal experiences. Churches that preach the word and lay emphasis upon apostolic teaching, fellowship, breaking of bread and prayers (Acts 2:42) are losing members to the new spiritual entertainment centers pastored by late night T.V. host type preachers. It is in the context of this religious atmosphere kooky religious idiocy has flourished. The world has had enough reason to reject, resist and ridicule the church when you consider some of the sensational shenanigans of some religious groups the shallow and mediocre preaching from many of our pulpits. Taking the Word of God seriously for what it actually says is a missing link in many churches today.

Another missing link in churches today is the preaching of “the gospel of the Kingdom of God.” There are two kinds of preaching today found in two kinds of churches. One is audience driven where preachers and churches look upon public opinion to know what the public wants to hear and the churches program and the preaching is geared to pleasing and entertaining the audience. Consequently there is little solid Biblical preaching found in them. The other is Biblically orientated and professes to be following the Scriptures in faith and practice. It is in this kind that there is found the missing link in a failure to preach the gospel of the Kingdom. If we set aside the churches in which the preacher’s messages that are easy going and entertaining without any mention of the fear of God, judgment, sin and repentance but

healthy doses of positive thinking and consider the message of the so called fundamentalist Bible believing evangelical preaching today, we still hear little about the kingdom of God. In these circles outside the contemporary, up to date and so called relevant preaching of today, we hear much about being born again, man's need of salvation and Jesus as a ransom for sin. Jesus certainly spoke about these things and they are Scriptural and important, but none of these themes were the theme of the message of Jesus. The new birth is only mentioned one time. This was his conversation with Nicodemus. He mentions dying as a ransom for us only one time (Matt. 20:28), and used the word "salvation" in very few passages. In contrast in the gospels Matthew mentions the Kingdom 52 times, Mark 19 times, Luke 44 times and John 4. For modern preachers, who use and preach the Bible, the Gospel of the Kingdom of God does not have the significance it had for Jesus and the apostles. The New Testament opens with the ministry and preaching of John the Baptist. His message which startled the whole nation was "the Kingdom of God is at hand!" John introduced Jesus as the Messiah and he "came preaching the gospel of God" (Mark 1:14). The word gospel means "good news". So what was the good news Jesus preached? Roy Gustafson in *What is the Gospel?* writes: "Billy Graham defines the Gospel by dividing it into two main components. The first element is the death of Jesus, which is half the Gospel. The other half, he says, is the resurrection of Jesus." It has been popular to take Paul's statements in I Corinthians 15:1-8 that the gospel he preached was the death, burial and resurrection of Jesus. These facts are certainly a part of the gospel but Jesus preached "the gospel of the Kingdom" (Matt. 4:23; 9:35) before he said anything concerning his death and resurrection. Jesus said the reason he was sent was to preach the Kingdom: "I must preach the kingdom of God to other cities also, because *for this purpose I have been sent*" (Luke 4:43). When Jesus sent the apostles out to preach he instructed them to preach *the kingdom of God*: "as you go, preach saying 'the kingdom of God is at hand'" (Matt. 10:7). "He sent them out to proclaim the kingdom of God and to perform healing" (Luke 9:2), "...heal those who are sick, and say unto them 'the kingdom of God has come near you'" (Luke 10:9). The preaching of the kingdom was so important that Jesus instructed a man to "let the dead bury the dead, but you go everywhere and proclaim the kingdom of God" (Luke 9:60).

After his ascension the Apostles, and the early church continued preaching the same message Jesus preached: "But when they believed Philip preaching the good news about the Kingdom of God and the name of Jesus Christ they were baptized, both men and women" (Acts 8:12), "And he entered the synagogue and continued speaking boldly reasoning and persuading them about the kingdom of God" (Acts 19:8). "...I went about preaching the kingdom..." (Acts 20:25). "...and he was explaining to them by solemnly testifying about the kingdom of God...and he stayed two full years preaching the kingdom of God" (Acts 28:23, 31). This is not the message being preached today. Jesus in his ministry demonstrated what the kingdom of God is: "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; behold they will say, 'look here it is' or 'there it is' for behold, the kingdom of God is in your midst'" (Luke 17:20,21). Wherever Jesus was, there was the kingdom. He further said: "But if I cast out demons by the finger of God, then the kingdom of God has come

upon you" (Luke 11:20). When we pray "Thy kingdom come" we are asking God to manifest Himself through us. This does not mean that the church is the Kingdom, rather that the rule of God is being manifested in His church just as it was manifested in the life of Christ, and this will be the ultimate manifestation of the kingdom when Christ and his church rule the world. Speaking of Christ and his church ruling the world is a missing link in preaching today because our preaching has been centered on leaving the world and seeing it destroyed, not upon it being redeemed and restored (Rom. 8:20,21; Heb. 2:5-8).

This brings us to the third missing link in the church: The destiny and inheritance of the people of God. The majority of Christians has been taught and thus believes that "heaven" is a city beyond the clouds for which the children of God are destined. Very few religious writers and popular preachers in today's religious system would dare to go against such engrained traditional teaching. However Jesus said "the meek shall inherit the earth" (Matt. 5:5). And John saw "the holy city, new Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, made ready as a bride adorned for her husband." We do not go *up* to the city; the city comes *down* to us. Jesus said: "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 also have received authority from my Father" (Rev. 2:26,27). The Apostle Paul stated: "If we endure, we shall also reign with him" (II Tim. 2:12). In the parable of the nobleman who went to distant country to receive a kingdom and then return, the rewards he gave to his faithful servants were "be in authority over ten cities and over five cities" (Luke 19:17,19).

George Ladd in *A Theology of the New Testament* stated it well: "Everything in the gospels points to the idea that life in the Kingdom of God in the age to come will be life on the earth, life transformed by the kingdom of God when His people enter in their full blessings". In his *Commentary on Romans* Martin Lloyd-Jones wrote: "We shall dwell in glorified bodies on the glorified earth. This is one of the great Christian doctrines that has been almost entirely forgotten and ignored. Unfortunately the church does not believe this, and therefore does not teach it." One of our best loved hymns states "We shall reign with Him on high". The Bible says nothing about our "reigning with him on high" but it does say: "He was given dominion, glory and a kingdom, that all the peoples nations, and men of every language might serve him. His dominion is an everlasting dominion which will not pass away and His kingdom is one which will not be destroyed...the saints of the Highest One will receive the kingdom and possess the kingdom for ever, for all ages to come...the sovereignty, the dominion, and the greatness of all the kingdoms under the whole heaven will be given to the people of the saints of the Highest One; His kingdom will be an everlasting kingdom, and all the dominions will serve and obey Him" (Dan. 7:14, 18, 27). Paul asked the Corinthians a question which could well be asked of the church today: "Do you not know that the saints will judge the world? Do you not know that we shall judge angels?" (I Cor. 6:2,3). To understand what it means to "judge" note the book of Judges. The Judges who judged Israel did not sit and pass out sentences, they ruled over Israel during the years of their judgeship. This doesn't sound as if we will be somewhere floating on a cloud. This is one of the missing links in the modern church.

