

Kingdom Focus

Why One Half Is Not Enough

by Amy Littler

What is the Gospel? This one essential question holds so much in the balance. Paul tells us, "For I am not ashamed of the gospel, for it is the power of God for salvation to everyone who believes, to the Jew first and also to the Greek" (Romans 1:16). Believing in the Gospel brings salvation to everyone regardless of background or tradition. The Gospel tells us that we have the same hope of salvation as the Jews. It offers us nothing less than life and immortality (II Timothy 1:10). It is the message of Truth and salvation (Ephesians 1:13), and we are commanded by Jesus to "Go into all the world and preach the gospel to all creation" (Mark 16:15). If we claim the name of Jesus and call ourselves Christians, our primary concern must be to understand "the gospel" as Jesus understood it. This is what following Jesus means. This is not a matter of semantics or higher level theology. Understanding the Gospel is the foundation of one's

faith. A deficient Gospel or a twisted Gospel will have disastrous short- and long-term effects.

Galatians 1:6-8

I am amazed that you are so quickly deserting Him who called you by the grace of Christ, for a different gospel; which is *really* not another; only there are some who are disturbing you and want to distort the gospel of Christ.

But even if we, or an angel from heaven, should preach to you a gospel contrary to what we have preached to you, he is to be accursed!

As we have said before, so I say again now, if any man is preaching to you a gospel contrary to what you received, he is to be accursed!

At all costs we must avoid the wrong gospel! It cannot be about tradition or being comfortable in what we have always known. It must always be about the Scripture revealing to us the Truth. Let it not be said of us:

II Timothy 4:3 and 4

For the time will come when they will not endure sound doctrine; but *wanting* to have their ears tickled, they will accumulate for themselves teachers in accordance to their own desires, and will turn away their ears from the truth and will turn aside to myths.

It would be easy to find teachers telling you whatever you want to hear. But we need to cling to the words of Jesus and the rest of Scripture to find our doctrine and Gospel. The Bible gives us this warning: "See to it that no one takes you captive through philosophy and empty deception, according to the tradition of men, according to the elementary principles of the world,

rather than according to Christ" (Colossians 2:8). Armed with the thirst for Truth, let us see what the Bible has to say about the Gospel, the key to our ultimate destiny.

Jesus gives us a clear mission statement early on in his ministry. "...I must preach the good news of the kingdom of God to the other cities also; for I was sent for this purpose" (Luke 4:43 RSV). The word translated "good news" in the New Testament is the word *evangelion*, also translated "gospel." It is unarguable that Jesus here defines his purpose — to preach the *Gospel of the Kingdom of God*. The teaching of Jesus concerning the Kingdom of God is the main determinative subject of all. This is radical and astonishing when one considers that the "orthodox" definition of the Gospel says nothing at all about the Kingdom that Jesus came to preach! The public has been offered a gospel based only on the death, burial, and resurrection of Jesus (DBR) for the sins of the world. Vital as the DBR is to the Gospel, it simply cannot be the whole story.

Mark 1:14 and 15

Now after John had been taken into custody, 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".

Not a word about his death, at this stage.

The very first words of Jesus Christ recorded in Matthew, concern the Kingdom. Moreover, he equates the Gospel with believing in the Kingdom of God. Jesus' first commandment in the book of Mark is to believe that the Kingdom of God is coming and to repent. Jesus never stopped preaching this Kingdom Gospel. "Jesus was going

throughout all Galilee, teaching in their synagogues and proclaiming the gospel of the kingdom, and healing every kind of disease and every kind of sickness among the people" (Matthew 4:23). Jesus traveled from place to place proclaiming this Good News of the coming Kingdom without a hint of his death, burial, and resurrection. It is not until Matthew 16:21 that Jesus *began* to teach about his death and resurrection. And when he did, the disciples did not even believe him! How could they have been preaching the forgiveness of sin through Christ's death yet? They could not have, because they had heard nothing about it.

Jesus instructed his disciples about what is about to happen to him.

Mark 9:31

For He was teaching His disciples and telling them, "The Son of Man is to be delivered into the hands of men, and they will kill Him; and when He has been killed, He will rise three days later.

At this point, when he introduced his disciples to the DBR, it still was not public knowledge or part of the Gospel. Verse 32 goes on to make this clear: "But they did not understand *this* statement, and they were afraid to ask Him." The disciples **did not understand**. And again, in Luke 9:45, they **did not understand**. They could not have been preaching something they did not understand themselves. It was only *after* Jesus had been raised that they began to understand. What then did Jesus commission them to preach?

"And he sent them out to **proclaim the Kingdom of God** and to perform healing" (Luke 9:2). "Departing, they *began* going throughout the villages, **preaching the gospel** and healing

everywhere" (Verse 6). Jesus sent them out to proclaim the Kingdom of God before they knew anything about the DBR. Note: preaching **the Gospel** is directly connected to the Kingdom message.

One might ask: After his resurrection, did the Gospel message change from one about the Kingdom to one solely about the DBR? We find that this is not the case.

Acts 1:3

To these He also presented Himself alive after His suffering, by many convincing proofs, appearing to them over *a period of forty days* and speaking of the things concerning the kingdom of God.

Clearly, the Gospel was still centered on the Kingdom. For forty days the disciples underwent an intensive "seminar" on the Kingdom of God taught by the King himself.

It would be strange to think that the very mission of Jesus would be rejected or glossed over by his personally trained disciples. A change of Gospel is the very opposite of what we see in the book of Acts. After his conversion, Paul was dedicated to the same message which had preoccupied Jesus. "And he entered the synagogue and continued speaking out boldly for three months, reasoning and persuading *them* about the kingdom of God" (Acts 19:8).

Not for a moment did Paul abandon the Gospel of the Kingdom to proclaim the Gospel of the grace of God. They are the same thing! Compare the following two verses:

Acts 20:24 and 25KJV

But none of these things move me, neither count I my life dear unto myself, so that I might finish my course with joy, and

the ministry, which I have received of the Lord Jesus, to testify the **gospel of the grace of God**.

And now, behold, I know that ye all, among whom I have gone **preaching the kingdom of God**, shall see my face no more.

Furthermore, in verse 27, the Kingdom Gospel is called the "whole purpose of God." Paul did not abandon his wholehearted attachment to the Gospel of the Kingdom (I Corinthians 9:23). In the following account, Paul is in Rome gathering the Jews.

Acts 28:23 RSV

...And he expounded the matter to them from morning till evening, **testifying to the kingdom of God and trying to convince them about Jesus** both from the law of Moses and from the prophets.

What we see after the ascension of Christ Jesus is the *addition* of the DBR, but **never** to the exclusion of the Kingdom of God. When the Jews rejected the Gospel of the Kingdom, Paul turned to the Gentiles. "Be it known therefore unto you [Jews], that the salvation of God is sent unto the Gentiles, and *that they will hear it*" (Acts 28:28KJV). The Kingdom of God and the salvation of God are connected as one.

In verses 30 and 31 we see Paul continue to teach the Gentiles regarding the Kingdom of God.

And he stayed two full years in his own rented quarters and was welcoming all who came to him, preaching the kingdom of God and teaching concerning the Lord Jesus Christ with all openness, unhindered.

The Gospel about the Kingdom of

God was Paul's message for both Jews and Gentiles. This means it is also our Good News. Galatians 3:29 tells us that if we belong to Christ then we are Abraham's descendants, and heirs to the same promises made to Abraham, i.e. the Kingdom of God.

This "two-pronged" Gospel was also preached by Philip in Acts: "But when they believed Philip preaching the good news about the kingdom of God and the name of Jesus Christ, they were being baptized, men and women alike" (Acts 8:12). Water baptism, the outward sign of entrance into the Christian Church, did not take place simply after they had "accepted Jesus into their heart." Rather, it was only after they *believed the Gospel of the Kingdom of God and in Jesus as Messiah and King of that Kingdom and now Lord of their lives*, that they could be considered Christians. Does it worry us that today's Christianity sounds nothing like the early Church? I think it should.

The Kingdom of God message was one that the Jews understood well. It began with the promises made to Abraham (Genesis 12:1-3) when the land was promised to him and his descendants, who include now all those who are Christ's. The promises were built upon the Davidic Covenant. David is promised an heir to rule on his throne for ever.

II Samuel 7:12-16

When your days are complete and you lie down with your fathers, I will raise up your descendant after you, who will come forth from you, and I will establish his kingdom.

He shall build a house for My name, and I will establish the throne of his kingdom forever.

I will be a father to him and he will be a son to Me; when he commits iniquity, I will correct

him with the rod of men and the strokes of the sons of men, but My lovingkindness shall not depart from him, as I took *it* away from Saul, whom I removed from before you. Your house and your kingdom shall endure before Me forever; your throne shall be established forever.

A promise had been given for a Messiah — a King over God's Kingdom. God would give David a royal house, kingdom, and throne for ever. Clearly this has not happened yet, and we are now awaiting the second coming of our Lord Christ Jesus to establish finally this promised Kingdom. Jesus is that heir of David. He will resurrect the faithful to reign with him in righteousness. Eventually, a new Jerusalem is going to **come down out of heaven** and **God will dwell with His people on the earth**. There will be no more war, suffering, or death. God will in fact wipe away all tears from His people's eyes (Revelation 21:2-4). The followers of Jesus will help him rule the world and the wicked will be destroyed (Revelation 2:26; I Corinthians 6:2; Daniel 7:27; Revelation 5:10).

The Jews knew the teachings of the prophets. They were waiting for the time when they would inherit the land. They were expecting the golden age.

Daniel 7:13 and 14, 18

...And behold, with the clouds of heaven One like a Son of Man was coming, And He came up to the Ancient of Days And was presented before Him. And to Him 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.

But the saints of the Highest One will receive the kingdom and possess the kingdom forever, for all ages to come.

This is the Kingdom of God as the Jews understood it. They were not confused in the slightest by Jesus saying, "Blessed *are* the meek: for they shall inherit the earth" (Matthew 5:5 KJV), or by Jesus' model prayer, "Thy kingdom come. Thy will be done, On earth as it is in heaven" (Matthew 6:10 RSV). That is exactly what they were waiting for! What they did not understand was that the Messiah had to suffer before he could reign (Isaiah 52 and 53). Tragically, they rejected the king they had been waiting for. Luke 1:33 tells us how intimately connected Jesus was to the prophecies of the Hebrew Bible. "And he will reign over the house of Jacob forever [(II Samuel 7:13, 16; Psalms 89:36 and 37; Daniel 2:44; 7:14, 18, 27)] and his **kingdom** will have no end." **Jesus Christ died for the Kingdom so that you and I could enter it.**