

# The Gospel of the Kingdom

Jesus and the apostles preached and demonstrated a Gospel centred on the Kingdom of God. The cross was **not** the focus of their Gospel; their focus was the announcement that God's Kingdom had come, and that Jesus was God's appointed and anointed King.

## The Gospel Jesus Proclaimed

Jesus was particularly clear that He had come to overthrow the kingdom of darkness and establish His Kingdom:

**“Now** is the time for judgment on this world; **now** the prince of this world will be driven out.” (Jn 12:31)

There can be no doubt that Jesus considered healing and deliverance to be central to His mission. He could have talked about forgiveness, about God's love or God's priority for relationship with Him rather than religious observance. But this is how Jesus described His mission:

“I will keep on driving out demons and healing people today and tomorrow, and on the third day I will reach my goal.” (Lk 13:32)

It is very important for us to understand **why** Jesus healed the sick and drove out demons. Many people have assumed that it was to prove that He was God's Son. But that is not the reason Jesus gives:

“But if I drive out demons by the finger of God, then the kingdom of God has come upon you.” (Lk 11:20)

For a fuller understanding of Jesus' Gospel, look at His announcement at the start of His ministry:

“The Spirit of the Lord is on me, because he has anointed me to preach good news to the poor. He has sent me to proclaim freedom for the prisoners and recovery of sight for the blind, to release the oppressed, to proclaim the year of the Lord's favour.” ... he began by saying to them, “Today this scripture is fulfilled in your hearing.” (Lk 4:16-21 NIV)

Here we see clearly that the Gospel is about setting people free from the oppression of Satan. It is the announcement of Satan's defeat and God's favour towards His children.

Notice, that the Gospel is NOT the announcement of warfare against Satan, but the bold assertion and demonstration that he has been bound and defeated:

"He even gives orders to impure spirits and they obey him." (Mark 1:27)

"I saw Satan fall like lightning from heaven. I have given you authority to trample on snakes and scorpions and to overcome all the power of the enemy; nothing will harm you." (Lk 10:18-19)

"But if it is by the Spirit of God that I drive out demons, then the kingdom of God has come upon you. Or again, how can anyone enter a strong man's house and carry off his possessions unless he first ties up the strong man? Then he can plunder his house." (Matt 12:28-29)

It is also important for us to see that Jesus did not claim to be healing and delivering by His own power, as the Messiah, but that it was the Father working in Him:

"Don't you believe that I am in the Father, and that the Father is in me? The words I say to you are not just my own. Rather, **it is the Father, living in me, who is doing his work.**" (Jn 10:10)

So we see clearly that Jesus views the Good News – the Gospel – as God's victorious Kingdom now being established on earth, in the lives of God's children. And because of this Jesus makes a wonderful invitation and promise:

"Come to me, all you who are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you and learn from me, for I am gentle and humble in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. For my yoke is easy and my burden is light." (Matt 11:28-30)

In this invitation we see a call to repentance ("Come to me..." involves turning away from one's past) and a call to discipleship ("Take my yoke upon you and learn from me"). A Growth Group is the ideal place for someone to respond to this invitation and become a disciple. It is also a very "light burden" compared to telling someone they must go to church.

## **The Gospel the Apostle's Proclaimed**

There are at least 17 descriptions of the Gospel in the Acts. Here is the complete list with the sermons in bold:

Acts 2:10; **Acts 2:17, 21, 23, 36, 38**; Acts 4:29-31; Acts 5:41; **Acts 7**; Acts 8:5-7, 12; **Acts 10:36-38, 42-43**; **Acts 13:32, 38-39**; Acts 14:3; **Acts 14:15**, 22; Acts 16:30-31; **Acts 17:7, 16, 18, 30-31**; Acts 18:5; Acts 19:8; Acts 20:21; Acts 26:17-18; Acts 28:8-9; Acts 28:23, 31.

Of these, at least 11 emphasise Jesus as Messiah or King. Only three descriptions of the Gospel include forgiveness of sins! The others emphasise turning to God in faith.

Twice in Acts we hear what Jesus instructed the apostles to proclaim:

He commanded us to preach to the people and to testify that **he is the one whom God appointed as judge of the living and the dead**. (Acts 10:42-43)

"I am sending you to them to open their eyes and **turn them from darkness to light**, and from the power of Satan to God, so that they may **receive forgiveness of sins** and a place among those who are sanctified by faith in me." (Acts 26:17-18)

Again we see a strong Kingdom emphasis. Jesus is the ruler and judge, and people need to turn from the kingdom and power of darkness to the Kingdom of Light and forgiveness. Further insight comes from Paul's preaching in Greece:

"They are all defying Caesar's decrees, saying that **there is another king, one called Jesus**." ... Paul was **preaching the good news about Jesus and the resurrection**. ... "He commands all people everywhere to repent. For he has set a day when **he will judge the world with justice** by the man he has appointed. He has given proof of this to everyone by raising him from the dead." (Acts 17:7, 16, 18, 30-31)

Although the cross of Christ was vital to the Kingdom of God, the focus of Gospel proclamation is on Jesus as the Messiah/King and the resurrection as the proof that Jesus is alive and reigning.

Acts 5:41 Day after day from house to house, they never stopped proclaiming **the good news that Jesus is the Messiah**.

Acts 8:5-7, 12 Philip went down to a city in Samaria and **proclaimed the Messiah** there ... when they believed Philip as **he proclaimed the good news of the kingdom of God and the name of Jesus Christ**, they were baptized, both men and women.

Acts 28:23, 31 He witnessed to them from morning till evening, **explaining about the kingdom of God**, ... he tried to persuade them about Jesus. ... He **proclaimed the kingdom of God and taught about the Lord Jesus Christ**.

## **Where is the Cross?**

The New Testament letters make it abundantly clear that the Cross of Christ is how we are forgiven and brought into God's family. Yet the cross rarely appears in the New Testament descriptions or preaching of the Gospel to unbelievers. One way to understand this is to think of the Gospel as a car that can rescue people from a fire or a flood. The Cross is like the engine in the car. Without an engine, a car is useless, no matter how nice it looks inside.

Imagine that we arrive at the scene of disaster and urge people to get into the car so we can take them to safety. We don't need to lift the hood and show them the engine before they get in the car. They don't need to know how the engine works, or anything about it. But without the engine they cannot be saved. After they have been driven to safety, they might want to know what made the car go so fast. Then we can show them the engine and explain how it works.

The Gospel would be empty and pointless words without Jesus' death on the Cross and His resurrection. But people don't need to know anything about the Cross in order to be saved. All they need to know is that Jesus is King and Judge and that He loves them and can save them if they repent and put their trust in Him. Later they can learn about the Cross.

But an engine needs fuel to power it. Without fuel, the engine is useless. The Holy Spirit is the fuel that powers the Cross. It is by the Holy Spirit that we are Born Again and made into God's children. It is the Holy Spirit that changes people's cold and rebellious hearts and enables them to believe and trust in Jesus.

The Gospel is completely dependent upon both the Cross of Christ and the work of the Holy Spirit. But when we share the Gospel with an unbeliever, we do not need to explain either the Cross or the working of the Holy Spirit. Remember that the Gospel is the power of God for salvation (Romans 1:16), not the theological explanation of how God enabled salvation to happen.

## The Gospel of Power

The Gospels and Acts are united in presenting the Gospel as "Jesus has bound Satan and His Kingdom of freedom and forgiveness is here now for those who believe". When we listen to the Gospels and to Acts we must conclude that the Gospel cannot be separated from healing and deliverance. Paul was insistent that a powerless gospel was no gospel at all:

"My message and my preaching were not with wise and persuasive words, but with a demonstration of the Spirit's power, so that your faith might not rest on human wisdom, but on God's power." (1 Cor 2:4-5)

"The kingdom of God is not a matter of talk but of power." (1 Cor 4:20)

And so, when the disciples are praying for effective Gospel witness, they pray for healing:

Now, Lord, consider their threats and enable your servants to speak your word with great boldness. **Stretch out your hand to heal and perform signs and wonders** through the name of your holy servant Jesus." After they prayed, the place where they were meeting was shaken. And they were all filled with the Holy Spirit and spoke the word of God boldly. (Acts 4:29-31)

And God answered their prayer:

"The Lord confirmed the message of his grace by **enabling them to perform signs and wonders** ... (Acts 14:3)

## The Foolishness of the Gospel

God has given us intelligence and minds that like to understand the world we live in. It is natural that we try to proclaim the Gospel in a way that makes sense to people, and that sounds reasonable. But our reasoning and intelligence has been corrupted by the fall, so that what is reasonable to God looks like foolishness to us:

For since in the wisdom of God the world through its wisdom did not know him, God was pleased through the foolishness of what was preached to save those who believe. (1 Cor 1:21)

This very important scripture tells us that people do not get to know God through understanding a reasonable Gospel, but through faith in what seems to be a foolish Gospel.

Paul is writing about Jesus being crucified as appearing foolish to the Jews and Greeks. But that is not the only aspect of the Gospel that appears foolish:

"For whoever wants to save their life will lose it, but whoever loses their life for me will find it." (Matthew 16:25)

"Unless you eat the flesh of the Son of Man and drink his blood, you have no life in you." (John 6:53)

"If anyone says to this mountain, 'Go, throw yourself into the sea,' and does not doubt in their heart but believes that what they say will happen, it will be done for them." (Mark 11:23)

Jesus said many things that appear foolish to the natural mind:

The person without the Spirit does not accept the things that come from the Spirit of God but considers them foolishness, and cannot understand them because they are discerned only through the Spirit. (1 Cor 2:14)

We have seen in this study that Jesus instructs us to preach healing for the sick as the starting point for the Gospel, but this appears foolish to us because not everyone we pray for is healed immediately – they may not be healed at all. Preaching sight for the blind when the blind remain blind makes us appear foolish. But we must accept that Jesus' wisdom is greater than our foolishness. We must continue to proclaim the gospel Jesus gave us, because that foolish Gospel is the power of God for salvation to those who are being saved.

## **The Gospel Explained**

Having highlighted the foolishness of the Gospel, we must not deny the importance of explanation. Jesus almost certainly spent more time talking and explaining than healing, as did the apostles:

Paul devoted himself exclusively to preaching, testifying to the Jews that Jesus was the Messiah. (Acts 18:5)

Paul entered the synagogue and spoke boldly there for three months, arguing persuasively about the kingdom of God. (Acts 19:8)

A young man named Eutychus sank into a deep sleep as Paul talked on and on. (Acts 20:9)

Talking and explaining things clearly are very important. Understanding the things of God is important. But *truth* is not defined by what seems reasonable

to us. "Let God be true, and every man a liar." (Romans 3:4). We must remember:

"The kingdom of God is not a matter of talk but of power." (1 Cor 4:20)

## **Our Gospel**

So where does this leave us? We must be honest and admit that we have mostly reversed Paul's claim and said, "The kingdom of God is not a matter of power but of talk." This is surely our biggest challenge – for pastors and for every disciple of Jesus. Will we commit ourselves to pursuing the Gospel of the Kingdom – the "foolish" Gospel of Powerful deliverance and healing and transformation? Or will we settle for a "reasonable" gospel of words and well-wishing?

We must NOT fall into the trap of thinking that understanding and explaining the gospel is the same as genuine proclamation. We are only being obedient to Jesus' command and commission if we proclaim the Gospel of the Kingdom with healing and deliverance.

Having said this, we must continue to be honest and admit that most of us experience a great deal of frustration and failure in this respect. That is why this question is so important. Will we give up and accept defeat, or keep trying because obedience and trust is more important to us than our own comfort?

This is where leadership and fellowship are so important. Let us commit together to proclaim the Gospel of the Kingdom, with healing and deliverance and to keep at it until we hear Jesus say, "Well done, good and faithful servant. Enter into the joy of your Master."

## **The Gospel in Four Words**

**Freedom:** God wants to break the power of evil over your life and set you free to know His love for you.

**Jesus:** He sent His Son Jesus to show us the way and make this possible.

**Repentance:** He invites you to turn from your own ways and put your trust completely in Him.

**Baptism:** If you want to make this complete change in your life, you must die to what you have been and let God give you His new life. We call this baptism...