

Some Notes On

The Kingdom of God

“This gospel of the Kingdom shall be
preached in the whole world
for a witness to all the nations,
and then the end shall come,”

Matt.24:14.

by

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What is the Kingdom of God
and how do we walk in the reality of Jesus being our King?

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THE KINGDOM OF GOD

“The gospel... is the power of God unto salvation to everyone who believes... for in it the righteousness of God is revealed from faith to faith; as it is written, But the righteous shall live by faith,” Rom.1:16 & 17.

What is the Kingdom of God?

Some believers think that entering the Kingdom of God only pertains to our going to heaven when we die. Whilst our hope of entering the Kingdom in heaven, if we should die before the Lord's return, is one aspect of what the Kingdom of God is all about, this understanding leaves us with little grasp of the purposes of God in this age.

There is also a future reality of the Kingdom of God which may be given little thought, but nevertheless is still a reality, and that is when Jesus is going to reign as King from Jerusalem for 1000 years in the next age, (Rev.20:6). In this age, however, the Kingdom of God is not of this world [realm], (John 18:36). It is spiritual and does not come with signs to be observed because **the Kingdom of God is within us**, (Luke 17:20&21).

The Kingdom of God, as normally portrayed in the Bible, refers to the reign of God over our lives. It is not the realm, or place over which He reigns. Our modern understanding of a 'Kingdom' is the place where a particular King or Queen reigns, like the United Kingdom. Also, modern Kings and Queens do not reign over those who live in their kingdoms in the sense of bringing people into subjection as they used to. So, we may be used to thinking of a kingdom as a place or nation, or even think of a kingdom as the actual citizens within it. In the New Testament, however, the predominant meaning of God's Kingdom is God's rule and reign. The other meanings are seldom used. **The 'gospel of the Kingdom' can, therefore, be rendered as the 'good news of the reign of God'**, but for the Kingdom of God to be a reality we have to accept His government over our lives. When the Kingdom of God becomes a present reality, and not just a future hope, men are able to fully enjoy the blessings of God's rule. We can then enter that abundant and victorious life promised in Scripture but enjoyed by so few. We can overcome when we accept Jesus as our King, putting Him in that place of being our ruler, rather than ourselves or any other man. We can experience Kingdom living, which is righteousness, peace and joy in the Holy Spirit, which Paul tells us is what the Kingdom of God is, (Rom.14:17).

Entering the Kingdom

Jesus said, “Unless one is born again he cannot see the Kingdom of God,” and “Unless one is born of water and the Spirit he cannot enter the Kingdom of God.” Jesus said, “We must be born again,” (John 3:3,5&7). (See Footnote 1)

So it is that all saints, those who have been born again of the Spirit of God, have been, [it is already done], delivered from the domain of darkness and transferred to the Kingdom of God's beloved Son, (Col.1:13). Paul tells us that the Father has qualified us to share in this inheritance of the saints in light, for in Jesus we have redemption, the forgiveness of sins, (Col.1:12&14). Although we are in the Kingdom, however, we may not fully see it, or walk in its reality, because our being transferred into the Kingdom, like everything else Jesus has accomplished for us, alludes us if we do not have a spiritual understanding and revelation of it. Just as it was in Old Testament times “God's people are destroyed for lack of knowledge,” (Hos.4:6). It is very sad that many Christian's have little understanding of

'Who they are in Christ' and have not grown in a knowledge of their Lord. For this reason they may show little reality of being in the Kingdom.

Essential Beginnings

Because the Holy Spirit's ministry as Teacher is not emphasised, (1Cor.2:13), new believers do not grow spiritually but remain as babes in Christ, (1Cor.3:2), becoming, so often, disciples of men rather than of Jesus. Every new believer needs to be pointed to the Holy Spirit's ministry as Teacher and leader into all Truth, the only one who is able to impart a spirit of wisdom and understanding and revelation in the knowledge of Him, (Eph.1:17), and help them grow.

Also, new believers need to begin their new life in Christ with an acknowledgement of death to self and a consecration of their lives to Christ. We are no longer our own but have been bought with a price, (1Cor.6:20). By accepting Jesus as our 'Saviour', but not confessing Him as our only 'Lord', we do not begin this Kingdom walk. This is a major significance of Water Baptism which effects our walk in newness of life, (Rom.6:3&4).

Jesus is Lord

Paul explains we cannot call upon the Lord unless we first believe, (Rom.10:14). If the gospel were fully preached, our confession of "Jesus as Lord" would not be just words, but a consecration bringing that new reality essential for the ongoing salvation of our souls and abundant life in Christ Jesus. Unfortunately so much preaching offers 'salvation only' with no emphasis on the need for repentance and the need make Jesus the Lord of our lives. Paul says that "no one can say, 'Jesus is Lord,' except by the Holy Spirit," (1Cor.12:3). This is not referring to the saying of the actual words but is speaking of confessing from our hearts that Jesus is one's actual Lord.

Paul tells us, it is when we confess with our mouth that "Jesus is Lord" and believe in our heart that God raised Him from the dead, that we are saved, for with the heart man believes, resulting in righteousness, and with the mouth he confesses, resulting in salvation, (Rom.10:9&10). Even though 'salvation' has become a reality for many they so often lose any Kingdom reality which this brings as they begin to look away from their King, His Kingdom, and His righteousness. It is the inner reality of righteousness which opens for us the way into the Kingdom as we declare Jesus as our Lord, and then, having received our full inheritance which righteousness brings, because we have been [past tense] blessed with "every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places in Christ," we then begin the 'Kingdom walk' as we take hold of this inheritance by faith. A walk which has to be a walk of faith, for the "righteous shall live by faith," (Rom.1:17).

Entering the Kingdom

Scripture speaks of our entering the Kingdom of God by new birth, (John 3:5 and Col.1:13), and also by means of our walk, as Peter describes in his second epistle, of how "the entrance into the eternal Kingdom of our Lord and Saviour, Jesus Christ, is abundantly supplied to us," (2 Pet.1:11). Peter explains that after we have "received a faith... by the righteousness of our God and Saviour, Jesus Christ," (2 Pet.1:1), by "applying all diligence in our faith," we are to "supply moral excellence, knowledge, self control, perseverance, godliness, brotherly kindness and love," (2 Pet.1:5-7).

This can appear confusing, but Peter is referring to our walk which is walked by faith. If we live by the Spirit and also walk by the Spirit, (Gal.5:25) - not striving to achieve a standard so as to be accepted by God, because He has already made us complete in Him, (Col.2:10), and not endeavouring to comply with a list of laws so we can get 'right' with God, for we are already 'right', and not trying to overcome our flesh in our own strength because we are bound to fail - we will not carry out the lusts of the flesh, (Gal.5:16). This explains how those who are led by the Spirit are not under law (Gal.5:18) but bring forth the fruit of the Spirit which is "love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self control," (Gal.5:22). It is achieved by walking in the Spirit.

Walking in the Spirit

Those who belong to Christ Jesus have [past tense] crucified the flesh with its passions and desires and are able to walk this walk by the Spirit, as they take up their cross daily and follow Him. Because our new spirit is now separated from our flesh with a circumcision made without hands, in the removal of the body of flesh by the circumcision of Christ, we can count ourselves as buried with Christ and raised up together with Him and so able to walk in newness of life. This is the 'way' we can now live our 'life'.

That few walk in this reality of walking in and being led by the Spirit is a tragic fact. Satan has been able to easily divert Christians from the victory that Jesus has already won for them, and the main way he accomplishes this is by substituting a counterfeit 'Christian Religion' for 'true Christianity'.

The Effects of Religion

The effect of religious spirits upon true Christians is very much misunderstood. By very subtle deception, Satan has deceived many and confused the gospel, producing a counterfeit 'Christian Religion' which looks the same but very definitely is not.

All religions may be described as mans own efforts and endeavours to be good so as to obtain favour with God. The reality is that they all fail! We are told that "there is none righteous, not even one," (Rom.3:10), yet men, through their religions, have tried to establish a righteousness of their own. **True Christianity is not a religion**, however, but a submitting to the righteousness of God, bringing relationship and fellowship with Him. It is not about man's desire to get to God but God's desire to reconcile man to Himself. Religion leaves man with an unsatisfied hunger for fellowship with the living God because it leaves man with a consciousness of sin. While ever we have that consciousness of sin we can never have that fellowship with God which He truly desires.

The 'Christian Religion' in its better form, as opposed to 'true Christianity', has long preached the need of salvation, but has still majored on the inability of man to please God because of his weakness, unbelief and sin. Whilst it may have preached to the world that they are sinners and need to accept Jesus as their Saviour and stop sinning, it has not presented God's power to free believers from sin's dominion. It has perpetuated the wrong understanding that the believer continues to be nothing but a 'miserable sinner'. So, coming into the fullness of our relationship with God is hindered because righteousness remains a mystery to most believers, despite the correct preaching of what Jesus has accomplished by dying on the cross. **Without a revelation of righteousness the gospel of Jesus Christ loses its impact upon the spirit man, and the ability of the gospel to change peoples lives is lost**. Without a revelation of righteousness we do not break fully

free from sin's dominion. Thus, the 'Christian Religion' becomes just another world religion, full of promises but with no substance or reality!

Sadly, the practice of Christianity in many places has therefore become a Sunday ritual with a greatly diminished effect upon this present life. Decent people may still appear decent, but this form of godliness denies the real power of what life in Jesus is all about, (2 Tim.3:5).

In the form of the 'Christian Religion', God's promises of victory and overcoming power are put off until one day in heaven, causing the believers intimacy with failure, misery, weakness, disappointment and sin, to paralyse faith in God's ability to make good His promises. At worse, death can even appear to be more appealing than life here with God. Some, upon finding themselves in a hostile world, robbed of their participation in, or an understanding of, God's plan, find contradictions and condemnation quenching their faith. Being forced to 'hang on' to the bitter end in the hope of making it to heaven one day, where everything will at last be all right, they then expect God to explain what it has all been about, and clear up the confusion. This is a sad reality for too many.

Deceived as to the true plans and purposes of God, believers no longer walk in the will of their heavenly Father but in dead works, doing things for God rather than what He has ordained.

The 'Christian Religion' in its worst form does not even uphold a correct revelation of salvation, and in its better forms does not provide the essential revelation of righteousness. We loose the understanding that the believer is now 'right' with God, a son, with divine favour imparted by God through faith, substituting a life where we try to measure up to God's standard by the keeping of a set of rules [laws]. The truth is that our redemption in Christ is a perfect work and the only requirement is for the believer to lay hold of **His** [God's] righteousness to be able to walk in newness of life. This difference may appear subtle, or may be difficult to understand, but in fact is crucial for every believer to get a revelation of.

Jesus said, "This gospel of the Kingdom shall be preached in the whole world for a witness to all the nations and then the end shall come," (Matt.24:14). Many evangelical Christians are sincerely involved in great efforts to preach the gospel of salvation to all the nations. Much missionary zeal is expended in many different activities but unfortunately they so often have a concept of the gospel which is not complete. Many believers, possibly without really thinking too deeply about it, think the Kingdom of God is manifest in the form of the visible Church organisations to which they belong. So, what is the gospel of the Kingdom?

Some Understandings of the Gospel of the Kingdom

Some think the 'Kingdom of God' only has a future meaning and reality pertaining to our life after this age, and many think the 'gospel' only pertains to our salvation from sins. So, most Christian activity is, and has been, involved in proclaiming a gospel of salvation only, but this is an incomplete truth and does not compare with that which is taught and proclaimed in the New Testament. Preaching about the 'Kingdom' is rarely encountered, and often when it is one finds that it is an erroneous message.

There is, of course, only one gospel and this is the gospel of the Kingdom, yet the Church has so often failed to proclaim the full gospel for much of the past 2000 years! The reason for this is that having come under the effect of the spirit of religion, the Church, the Body of Christ, has been ineffectual in proclaiming that which only the 'Church in freedom' can powerfully proclaim.

During the last 2000 years the emphasis on the King and the Kingdom has been distorted, lost, or confused, so that the gospel is so often reduced to a message of 'salvation only' that offers an escape from hell and an inheritance only in the future, after this age. The message has been divided so the 'gospel' is for now, but the 'Kingdom' is for the future. This is not the message preached by the early Church, who proclaimed that the Kingdom of God is, and has to be, a present reality in addition to a future hope.

Before the Lord returns the 'gospel of the Kingdom' will be preached to all the nations. Although not understood by many, Scripture indicates that it will coincide with a time of distress such as has not been seen before, yet it will reach all nations bringing in a harvest of a multitude from every nation, tribe, people and tongue. There is only one end-time harvest mentioned in Scripture and this occurs during the 'great tribulation' which is coming upon the earth before the Lord returns.

What is the Gospel?

The word 'gospel' means 'good news'. The original Greek word, 'euangelion' denotes a reward for good tidings but later came to stand for the good news itself. As already stated, there is only one gospel and this is the gospel of the Kingdom. The gospel of the Kingdom, however, has two sides to it, yet most evangelical Christians usually only identify and preach one side. This omission needs to be addressed if our preaching is to become effective.

The First Side of the Gospel

The first side of the gospel is to do with that which Jesus accomplished through His death on the cross. Believers have been reconciled to God through the death of Jesus, for while they were still enemies they were reconciled to God through the death of His Son, (Rom.5:10), having been forgiven all their transgressions, and having had the certificate of debt cancelled, consisting of decrees against them, which was hostile to them. God has taken it out of the way, having nailed it to the cross, (Col.2:13 & 14). Thus, believers are brought near to God by the blood of Christ, (Eph.2:13), and are reconciled to God through the cross, (v.16). Having been separated and being far off from God because of sin, they have now been loosed, or washed, from their sins by His blood, (Rev.1:5). It is on the basis of what Jesus did for us on the cross, and on that basis alone, that God can forgive us of all our sin, for all have sinned and fallen short of the glory of God, (Rom.3:23), and the wages of sin is death, (Rom.6:23). If Jesus had not paid the penalty for us, our forgiveness and reconciliation would not have been possible. We, who have believed, are redeemed, and the debt we owed has been paid in full, but this 'good news' is only part of it.

The Second Side to the Gospel

Jesus said that "Repentance for the forgiveness of sins should be preached in His Name to all nations," (Luke 24:47), but the gospel has not only to do with the forgiveness of sins, which can be likened to the debit side of an account book, but has a second side, a credit side also. **The credit side, however, is rarely preached!**

Having cancelled out our debt through Jesus blood, God can now place to our credit His gift of righteousness and all that this means. This righteousness is a free gift, (Rom.5:17). This righteousness of God is available through faith in Jesus Christ "for all those who believe," (Rom.3:22).

The credit side of the gospel provides us with all that we are in Christ Jesus. **Jesus did not only die for our sins, that we might be forgiven, but was also raised from the dead to give us life. that we might become the righteousness of God in Christ Jesus.** The credit side of the gospel imparts to us His righteousness. The debit side of the gospel is linked to what Jesus accomplished on the cross and the credit side is linked to what was accomplished when God raised Jesus from the dead.

The credit side of the gospel pertains to the fact that in Christ we have been raised together with Him and are seated at the right hand of the Father; we are holy, sanctified; we are saints; we are righteous, cleansed from all unrighteousness and much, much more. We have been, [it is already done], transferred from the domain of darkness to the Kingdom of Gods beloved Son, (Col.1:13).

The gospel of the Kingdom is, therefore, not just about the cross, even though that is so very precious, but also about the fact that Jesus was raised from the dead, for Jesus was raised to give us new life. It is through the resurrection that we are born again and His life is imparted to us, (1Pet.1:3), and it is through the Lord's resurrection that we are made righteous, (Rom.4:22-25). **It is by grace that we, who have believed, are given the highest possible position in Christ and then exhorted to maintain a walk that is in accordance with our right standing in Christ.** It is not by our effort that this is done, for Jesus has also made a 'way' for us to do this. Unless we have a true understanding of this, we continue to try to achieve a walk by compliance to the law. Like a beggar we have been lifted up from the gutter and set amongst princes and then exhorted to be princely. Scripture tells us that in Christ we are made "complete in Him" even if, in our experience, we feel far from this reality, (Col.2:10).

Our Standing and State

Much misunderstanding, even amongst mature believers, is caused by our not rightly dividing Scripture as to our 'standing', or position in Christ, and our 'state', or walk, which is so often far from what it should be. This distinction is very important to make. It is a distinction that is little understood, resulting in many returning to the 'law'.

Our 'standing' is the result of the work of Christ, and is perfect, being imparted to us in its entirety the moment we are born again. Nothing thereafter in the believers life adds in any way to this complete work in Christ.

It is through faith that this inheritance is conferred upon all believers, and the weakest and the strongest saints have an equal title to it. The actual 'state' of any believer may be far below their 'standing', as any saint is only too aware.

This division is clearly seen in Scripture. In Christ we are all saints, (1Cor.1:2), born of God, (1John 5:1), and as children, heirs also, heirs of God and fellow-heirs with Christ, (Rom.8:17), to an inheritance which is imperishable and undefiled and will not fade away, reserved in heaven for us, (1Pet.1:4), having [past tense] obtained an inheritance, in Christ, (Eph.1:11). We are sons of God, (Gal.4:6), a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people for God's own possession, (1Pet.2:9), loved, released from our sins by Jesus blood, and made to be a kingdom of priests, (Rev.1:5&6). We are priests, complete in Him, (Col.2:10), having eternal life, (1John 5:13), blessed with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places, (Eph.1:3); made alive together with Christ and raised with Him, seated in heavenly places in Christ Jesus, (Eph.2:4-6). We were all baptised into one

body, (1Cor.12:13) by one Spirit, and are members of His body, (Eph.5:30), redeemed, sanctified, and righteous, (1Cor.1:30).

Yet we also see that Christians are described by Paul as carnal, displaying envyings, strife and divisions, (1Cor.3:1-3), some arrogant, (1Cor.4:18), needing to put off anger, wrath, malice, blasphemy, and abusive speech, (Col.3:8). We see that although we have been sanctified through the offering of the body of Christ, (Heb.10:10), we still need to be sanctified wholly, (1Thess.5:23). Although we are perfect, (Phil.3:15), by one offering, God having perfected for all time those who are sanctified, (Heb.10:14), we, like Paul, have not already become perfect, (Phil.3:12). So, there is still a work to be done in us with possible chastisements from our heavenly Father, (Heb.12:10). Just like a prince, whilst he is a child, may be as wilful or disobedient as any other child, needing teaching and chastisement on occasions to grow into princely maturity, he is, nevertheless, no less a prince on one day than any other. In like manner, for every true son of the Kingdom, God has predestined us to be conformed into the image of His Son, (Rom.8:29). So how is this to be done?

Circumcised with a Circumcision Made Without Hands

The ability to walk the walk is available because we are circumcised with a circumcision made without hands in the removal of the body of flesh by the circumcision of Christ, so we might walk in the Spirit and no longer walk in the flesh, (Col.2:11).

To understand how we walk in the Spirit, it is useful to understand the threefold nature of man, that he is spirit, soul, and body, (see 1Thess.5:23). He is a spirit who has a soul and lives in a body. Just as Scripture refers to the threefold nature of man, Scripture also refers to the twofold of man, that he has an inner man and an outer man, (2Cor.4:16). These Scriptures need to be harmonised in our understanding for they are not contradictory.

Unlike animals, man has been made in the image and likeness of God, (Gen.1:26). We are spirit beings who live in a body and have a soul, (mind, will and emotions). God is described by the writer to the Hebrews as the "Father of spirits," Heb.12:9, and it is in the spiritual realm that we have fellowship and communion with God. The real 'us' is our inner man, our spirit, that is the new creation, (2Cor.5:17), for when we are born again God puts a new spirit in us, (Ez.36:26). So, it is in our spirit man that we are made complete in Him, despite the fact that we still have our 'body of sin'. However, in Him we were circumcised, [it is done], with a circumcision made without hands, in the removal of the body of flesh by the circumcision of Christ, (Col.2:11). Whilst we were dead in our transgressions and the uncircumcision of our flesh, God made us alive together with Jesus so that our inner man could be made new and a new spirit put within us, that He might also put His Spirit within, (Col.2:13). Now we can walk in His statutes and observe His ordinances, (Ez.36:27), if we walk by the Spirit. This is the New Covenant which we, the Church, have already come into and which is still a promise for the house of Israel, (Jer.31:33&34 and Heb.10:16&17).

Walking by Faith

So, we can now be led by the Spirit and walk in the spirit because we have a new spirit and Christ is in us. Our spirit has been made alive because of righteousness, even though our body is dead because of sin, (Rom.8:10). However, for us to obtain the benefit in our lives of what has already been done for us in Christ, we need to understand what He has accomplished for us and walk in the reality of it by faith. **We are unable to believe be-**

yond our understanding. Satan is well aware of this, that because of a lack of knowledge God's people perish, (Hos.4:6), and so endeavours to keep us from the Truth.

It is essential, if we are to walk in victory, for us to walk according to the Spirit with our minds set on the things of the Spirit, and not on the flesh. The mind set on the flesh is death, but the mind set on the Spirit is life and peace, (Rom.8:4-6). We can either believe the reality of what the Word of God says we are in Christ or believe the reality of what our flesh would indicate. If, by the Spirit, we are putting to death the deeds of the body, we will live, for all those who are being led by the Spirit of God are the sons of God, (Rom.8:13-14). Scripture tells us that this is the normal Christian life which God desires for every believer, but sadly it has become a rarity.

The Kingdom Now

This Kingdom walk, therefore, can now be ours if we walk in the Spirit with the Kingdom as a present reality, having Jesus as our King, our only Master and Lord, (Jude 4), being taught as His disciples by the Holy Spirit rather than becoming disciples of men.

In practice, many of us have taken many years from our conversion to begin to walk in the Kingdom because we had not understood the reality of our inheritance, for it had not been preached or taught. Most new believers have been pointed to the kingdoms of men, one of the numerous church organizations, becoming disciples of men, and thereby confused this with the reality of God's Kingdom. Others have just suffered from a lack of knowledge of what Scripture tells us about our inheritance in Christ, just who, and what we are in Him. Even when we have begun to walk in the Spirit, Satan may have deceived us into walking once more by the works of the law, just as he did with the Galatian Church, (Gal.1:7&9).

To fully understand and learn about the Kingdom, is not a quick work. Paul testified solemnly of the gospel of grace, "preaching the Kingdom and declaring the whole purpose of God," to the believers at Ephesus for three years, (Acts 20:24-26&31). Paul spent two years "preaching the Kingdom of God and teaching concerning the Lord Jesus Christ" in Rome, (Acts 28:31). Time is required because Scripture explains that there is a spiritual growth in every believers life, where we should grow from being a baby to being a young man and then on to be a father. (1Cor.3:1 & 1John 2:12-14). (See Footnote 2)

So, may this gospel of the Kingdom be, once again, fully preached in this end-time hour, that the many may be led to righteousness, and so appropriate all that Jesus has accomplished for us in His death and resurrection, and may we encourage one another to seek God's Kingdom and His righteousness.

Amen

Footnote 1 :- Many different doctrines and understandings have been gleaned from this Scripture. Some consider that the reference to being "born of water" (John 3:5) is a reference to water baptism but I understand John 3:6, "That which is born of the flesh is flesh and that which is born of the Spirit is spirit," as Jesus' immediate interpretation that being "born of water and the Spirit" refers to our natural birth and our spiritual birth. Likewise, I consider Jesus was only emphasizing the need to be "born again" to both see and enter the Kingdom, and was not making any other point about two stages of Kingdom beginnings, as some suggest.

Footnote 2 :- NB. In the spiritual realm there is no gender.