

Explaining the Gospel of the Kingdom

Scripture: *1 Cor. 15:1-8 & John 3:1-16.*

Exegetical Big Idea: Personalizing the gospel by repenting of our sin and placing our faith in Christ brings us into the Kingdom of God.

Introduction

In **Matthew 24** Christ Jesus talks about the signs that will precede the end of the world. In **verse 24** of that chapter this is what Christ said: *And this gospel of the kingdom will be preached in the whole world as a testimony to all nations, and then the end will come.* In this verse the Lord connects *the gospel* with *the Kingdom of God*. So, what is the connection between the gospel and the Kingdom of God, and why is it important for us to know this?

We are going to answer this question over the next three Sundays, beginning with this morning, by reflecting on the theme of *The Gospel of the Kingdom*. First, this morning, we will *explain* what the gospel of the Kingdom is. Second, next Sunday, we will look at how we *experience* the gospel of the Kingdom in our daily Christian lives. Third, on the following Sunday, we will look at how we *express* to others the gospel of the Kingdom.

So, this morning the title of the first of our three sermons is: *Explaining the Gospel of the Kingdom*. In this first sermon we will look at first, what the *Kingdom of God* is. Second, we will look at what the *gospel* is. Third, we will think about how we personalize in our lives the gospel of the Kingdom. The two main passages for our reflections this morning are **John 3:1-16** and **1 Corinthians 15:1-8**. *Read passages.*

I. What is the Kingdom of God (John 3:3)

- 1) In **verse 3** of our **John 3** passage, Jesus tells Nicodemus, a Jewish leader who had come to see Him one night, that no one can see the Kingdom of God unless they are born again. So, we have to ask, what is the Kingdom of God? Define the word *kingdom*. With this definition in mind, one Bible scholar has provided us with what I consider to be this excellent definition of the Kingdom of God: *God's people living in God's place, under God's rule, and therefore enjoying God's blessing of peace and well-being.*
- 2) The first two chapters of the Bible show us that God did indeed create our world with this Kingdom perspective in mind because our first parents were God's people living in God's place in the Garden of Eden under God's rule, and therefore enjoying God's blessing of peace with one another, peace with nature, and most importantly, peace with God.
- 3) The third chapter of the Bible records how this reality of God's Kingdom was disrupted when our first parents, with all of us inside them, chose to obey the voice of Satan instead of the voice of God. By doing this our first parents decided to turn away from God's Kingdom purposes for us, and His creation.

- 4) Bible scholars call this turning away from God's Kingdom purposes by our first parents *the Fall* because, we all, inside our first parents, fell away from God's original Kingdom reality for His creation. This is how the Prophet Isaiah puts it in **Isaiah 53:6**: *We all, like sheep, have gone astray, each of us has turned to our own way.* Immediately after the Fall, in **Gen. 3:15**, before God expelled our first parents, with all of us inside them, from the Garden of Eden for their terrible decision, God pronounced judgment upon the snake, Satan, who had influenced our first parents' ill-fated decision. This is what God said to the snake: *I will put enmity between you and the woman, and between your offspring and hers; he will crush your head, and you will strike his heel.* God was promising here that one day a man would come out of a woman to destroy Satan's control over the human race and restore human beings back into God's original kingdom reality.
- 5) The NT presents Jesus Christ to us as the offspring of the woman who came into the world to crush the head of Satan to free humans from Satan's control. This is how **1 John 3:8** puts it: *The reason the Son of God appeared was to destroy the devil's work.* This is why we read in **Mark 1:14-15** that when He began His ministry, Christ said, *The time has come. The kingdom of God has come near.* This is also why His entire ministry was based on His teaching and preaching about the Kingdom of God as we see Him doing in our **John 3** passage. In **Luke 11:20**, Christ announced that His miracles were an indication that, with His first coming into the world, the Kingdom of God had broken into the world in a fresh new way. Through His death and resurrection, Christ Jesus ushered into this world the Kingdom of God as a spiritual reality. This is why in **John 18:36** Christ told Pontius Pilate that His Kingdom is not of this world.
- 6) God, of course, still controls and guides the history of the world, and when Christ returns into the world at His Second Coming, God will judge the world, and establish His perfect material Kingdom in this world. At that time Christ will fully restore God's original Kingdom purposes for His creation. So, for now, we live our Christian lives in the tension of what Bible scholars refer to as *the already and not yet*. That is, the Kingdom is already here spiritually, but not yet fully manifested as a physical reality. This is how **Rev. 11:15** describes what will happen when Christ returns into the world at His Second Coming: *The kingdom of the world has become the kingdom of our Lord, and of His Christ: and He shall reign for ever and ever.* In **Matt. 6:10**, Christ Jesus taught us to pray by saying: *Thy kingdom come.* This prayer expresses our Christian expectation of the coming of God's Kingdom as a physical reality in this world when there will no more sin, no more suffering, and no more death, as we read in **Rev. 21:1-4**.
- 7) So, we can say that for us today, the Kingdom of God is God's people living in God's place under God's rule, and therefore enjoying peace with God on the basis of what Jesus Christ accomplished for us on the cross.

II. What is the Gospel (1 Cor. 15:3-8)

- 1) We hear the word *gospel* so often that we simply assume that we understand it although we may only have a vague idea of what it really is.

Eg: *NT Gospels, gospel music, the gospel truth, etc.* In **verse 1** our **1 Corinthians 15** passage, Paul writes that he was going to remind the Corinthian Christians of the gospel he had preached to them. He then proceeds to do so in **verses 3** and **4**. By doing so, Paul teaches us what the gospel really is.

- 2) In this passage, and in many other passages in the NT, wherever you see this word *gospel*, it is a translation of the Greek word *euangelion*. *Euangelion* means *good news*. The first translators of the Bible from Greek into English replaced *good news* with the word *gospel*. They did this by taking two words, *good* and *spell*, and joining them together. The word *spell*, at that time, was used in place of our modern English word *story*. This was because to tell a *story* well is to cast a *spell* on your listeners as you capture their full interest and their imaginations. These first translators of the NT from Greek to English considered the story of Jesus Christ in the NT to be such a *good spell*, that is, such a good story, that they decided to join the word *good* and *spell* to form this word, *gospel*.
- 3) In this **1 Cor. 15** passage, Paul explains why the story of Jesus Christ is such a good story by stating in **verse 3** that *Christ died for our sins according to the Scriptures, he was buried, and he was raised on the third day according to the Scriptures*. Paul uses the word *scriptures* here to refer to the OT, which was the Bible of the early NT church. So, here, he is referring to OT passages such as **Isaiah 53:8-10** that had prophesied that Christ would die for the sins of God's people, and **Psalms 16:10**, that had prophesied that Christ would be raised from the dead.
- 4) In **verse 4**, when Paul states that Christ *was buried*, he means that Christ died a real death, not a pretended death. This is why from **verses 5** to **7**, Paul then refers to eyewitnesses of Christ's death and resurrection who were still alive at the time he wrote this letter. These included the Apostle Peter and the other disciples of Christ, as well as five hundred other followers of Christ. Paul was obviously saying that these eyewitnesses could easily testify to the truth of what he was writing about the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ. In **verse 8** Paul then declares that the resurrected Christ also appeared to him. Here, Paul is referring to his life-changing encounter with the risen Christ on the road to Damascus that we read about in **Acts 9**.
- 5) When in **verse 3**, Paul writes that Christ died *for our sins*, let me explain to you why this is good news. God is completely holy and righteous. As such, our sins spiritually separate us from Him and also place us under His righteous judgment. This is why in **Rom. 6:23** Paul wrote that the wages of sin is death. In order for us not to die for our sins we need God's forgiveness of our sins. This is why, throughout the OT, the people of God had to sacrifice the blood of bulls and goats to atone for their sins.
- 6) In **Heb. 10:4**, however, we read that *it is impossible for the blood of bulls and goats to take away sins*. This is obviously because it is human beings like you and I who have sinned against God, not the innocent bulls and goats that were being sacrificed. So, ultimately, it requires the blood of a human being to atone for the sins of human beings.

So, either we die for our sins ourselves, or we find someone to die for us who has no sin of His own to die for. Because only God Himself has no sin, and because God, being our Creator, is the only one who can represent all of us, **verse 16** of our **John 3** passage tells us that because of His great love for us, God became a real human being in the form of Christ Jesus so that the blood of a human being who had no sin, and who could represent all human beings, would be shed on the cross to permanently atone for our sins. Paul is emphasizing this foundational basis of the gospel in **verse 3** of our **1 Cor. 15** passage when he writes that Christ died for our sins.

- 7) So, we can say that *the gospel* is the *good news* that announces to us that, sinful human beings, like you and I, can be forgiven our sins by God on the basis of our faith in the historically verifiable death and resurrection of Jesus Christ in Palestine two thousand years ago. When we accept and believe this gospel, we spiritually enter into the Kingdom of God, as Christ tells Nicodemus in our **John 3** passage. This is why Christ Jesus linked *the gospel* with *the Kingdom of God* in **Matt. 24:14** when He referred to *the gospel of the Kingdom*.

III. How We Personalize the Gospel of the Kingdom (John 3:3 & 1 Cor. 15:2)

- 1) Both our **John 3** and our **1 Cor. 15** passages show us how to personalize the gospel of the Kingdom in our lives.
- 2) In **verse 3** of **John 3** Jesus told Nicodemus that no one can enter the Kingdom of God unless they are born again. In **Mark 1:15**, which I have already mentioned that when Jesus Christ began His ministry the first words He spoke were: *The kingdom of God has come near. Repent and believe the good news!* This teaches us that the two conditions we must meet to be born again and to enter the Kingdom of God are, first, *repentance* and, second, *believing the good news of the gospel*.
- 3) The first condition we must meet to be born again to enter the Kingdom of God is *repentance*. The English word *repentance* in the NT is a translation of the Greek word, *metanoeo*. *Meta* - *to change*. *Noeo* - *the mind*. This word refers to more than an emotional response of remorse over sin. It refers to a turning of our hearts, our minds, and our wills to God that results in a permanent change of behavior. Repentance always carries with it the sense of turning back to God through a change of mind and heart about God and about oneself. We repent by responding in obedience to God the Holy Spirit who begins a work in our hearts to call us back to God. We allow the Holy Spirit to bring us to experience what the Apostle Paul refers to as *godly sorrow* in **II Cor. 12:7**. Godly sorrow is a very real deep inward awareness of our selves as sinners before a holy God. This can happen gradually in our lives, if we grew up in a Christian family, or in a dramatic and decisive way, as happened to Paul on the road to Damascus. Either way, repentance, this inner turning back to God, is our unavoidable first step into the Kingdom of God because, as I explained earlier, all of us, in our first parents, Adam and Eve, in the Garden, turned away from God and we left His Kingdom.

- 4) The second condition we must meet to be born again to enter the Kingdom of God is, *believing the good news of the gospel*. Believing the good news of the gospel means that we accept Jesus Christ as the eternal Son of God who came into the world to take our sins upon Himself on the cross, to die on our behalf, and to be resurrected.
- 5) When we accept that He did this for us as sinners, we receive God's forgiveness, and we receive His eternal life, as Jesus promises in **verse 16** of our **John 3** passage. We are then in-dwelt by the Holy Spirit to become spiritually born again, and we enter the Kingdom of God, as Jesus declares to Nicodemus in **verses 3** and **5** of our **John 3** passage.
- 6) This is exactly what Paul is referring to in **verse 2** of our **1 Corinthians** passage when he writes that it is by, or through, the gospel that we are *saved*, if we *hold firmly to it*, otherwise, he says, we have believed in vain. What Paul means by this phrase, *holding firmly to the gospel*, is that when we hear the gospel, we go beyond merely accepting it intellectually to be true with our minds, and we receive it in our hearts with faith and true repentance.
- 7) So, to summarize, we personalize the gospel of the Kingdom when upon hearing the gospel, we receive it in our hearts and accept it to be true, we repent of our sin on the basis of what Christ accomplished for us on the cross, and by so doing, we are spiritually born again, and we enter the Kingdom of God.

Conclusion

So, this is what the gospel of the Kingdom is, and this is how we personalize it in our lives.

Tell Tim Keller story. In the same way, perhaps you have known about the gospel all along but you have never truly understood it enough to truly receive it with your heart. Perhaps in a meeting somewhere someone asked you to come forward and repeat a certain prayer and you did so, but without having first experienced true repentance that is the work of the HS in our hearts.

What Paul teaches us from our **1 Cor. 15** passage is that, we only become truly born again, and we spiritually enter the Kingdom of God, as Christ Jesus told Nicodemus in our **John 3** passage, when we hold firmly to the gospel when we hear it, and we receive it in faith and with repentance. A person who says *I am born again* but who shows no change in his or her life with reference to God or to sin shows that they have not truly repented of their sin, they have not truly understood the Gospel, and they have certainly not personalized the gospel of the Kingdom in their life.

This morning, if you have never done so, you can personalize the gospel of the Kingdom by expressing your repentance to God in three ways. First, you tell God from your heart that you are *sorry* for all your sins. Second, you say *thank you* to God that He sent Jesus Christ to take your place of punishment for your sins on the cross. Third, you ask God to *please* send His Holy Spirit to live in you so that from now, on you can live as God wants you to live.

If you do so this morning, you will be born again. You will begin to experience a strong desire to turn from sin and you will see that your thoughts, and your actions will begin to change from what they used to be. You will never be the same again because you would have personalized in your life the gospel of the Kingdom.

Next Sunday, in our second sermon in this series of three sermons, we shall reflect on how we experience the gospel of the Kingdom in our daily Christian lives.

Let us pray.

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Tigoni,
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