

The Gospel of Christ

What was the message brought by Jesus Christ, which so attracted the crowds that thousands were prepared to walk miles to listen to Him and stay until they were weak enough to risk fainting, Matthew 15:32, ‘Then Jesus called his disciples to him and said, “I have compassion on the crowd because they have been with me now **three days** and have nothing to eat. And I am unwilling to send them away hungry, lest they faint on the way.”’

Now of course many came to see the miracles of healing, verse 31, ‘The people were amazed when they saw the mute speaking, the crippled made well, the lame walking and the blind seeing. And they praised the God of Israel.’ NIV. After the feeding of the 5,000, no doubt some even hoped to be fed, but it had to be far more than that, or the Pharisees and the Sadducees would not have been so alarmed.

The stage had been set by the scriptures of the Old Testament, as far back as Genesis 49:10 and Isaiah 7:14, 9:7. ‘The sceptre will not depart from Judah, nor the ruler's staff from between his feet, until he to whom it belongs shall come and the obedience of the nations shall be his’. NIV.

‘Therefore the Lord himself will give you a sign. Behold, the virgin shall conceive and bear a son, and shall call his name Immanuel.’ Of the greatness of his government and peace there will be no end. He will reign on David's throne and over his kingdom, establishing and upholding it with justice and righteousness from that time on and forever. The zeal of the LORD Almighty will accomplish this. NIV.

So, it had to be a kingdom on Earth. Jeremiah 33 17, “For thus says the LORD: David shall never lack a man to sit on the throne of the house of Israel...”

After Daniel's prophecy in Daniel 9:25 (“Know therefore and understand, That from the going forth of the command To restore and build Jerusalem Until Messiah the Prince, There shall be seven weeks and sixty-two weeks; The street shall be built again, and the wall, Even in troublesome times”), by the time of Christ, the Jews were anxiously looking for the expected arrival of their Messiah, who they believed would deliver them from their captors the Romans, so it was hardly surprising that the Parthian Magi, leaders of the “lost” 10 Tribes, were also drawn to the birth of Christ. This mood was also heightened by the appearance of John the Baptist, who brought a message about the Kingdom of God, and the imminent coming of the Messiah, so the people were keyed up and expecting the arrival of their deliverer, Luke 3:15, ‘Everyone was expecting the Messiah to come soon, and they were eager to know whether John might be the Messiah. NLT.

Even the Samaritans expected the Messiah at that time, John 4:25, ‘The woman said, “I know the Messiah is coming—the one who is called Christ. When he comes, he

will explain everything to us.” NLT. The whole land was excited when they heard the news that the great deliverer had arrived, who could heal the sick, cast out demons, and raise the dead! Surely, He would now drive out the hated Romans and establish the Kingdom of God!

John the Baptist had been successful in preparing the way for Jesus, Mark 1:3, "a voice of one calling in the wilderness, 'Prepare the way for the Lord, make straight paths for him.'" He had laid a solid foundation of belief in the coming Messiah, Matthew 3:1-3, 'In those days John the Baptist came, preaching in the wilderness of Judea and saying, "Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is near." This is he who was spoken of through the prophet Isaiah:

"A voice of one calling in the wilderness,
**'Prepare the way for the Lord,
make straight paths for Him.'**"

He was the archetypal prophet people could easily recognise and was readily accepted, especially as he claimed nothing but a preparatory role, Mark 1:6, 'John wore clothing made of camel's hair, with a leather belt around his waist, and he ate locusts and wild honey'. Once that role was fulfilled, he finally pointed his followers to Jesus, who was ready to build on John's foundation, John 1:29, 'The next day he saw Jesus coming toward him, and said, "Behold, the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world!' And Mark 1:14-15, 'Now after John was arrested, Jesus came into Galilee, proclaiming the gospel of God, and saying, "The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God is at hand; repent and believe in the gospel."

It is clear that the central theme of the message brought by both John and Jesus is the gospel, or good news of the Kingdom of God, or the Kingdom of Christ, though Christ sometimes referred to it as the Kingdom of Heaven. Cf. Daniel 7:13-14, "I saw in the night visions, and behold, with the clouds of heaven there came one like a son of man, and he came to the Ancient of Days and was presented before him. And to him was given dominion and glory and a kingdom, that all peoples, nations, and languages should serve him; his dominion is an everlasting dominion, which shall not pass away, and his kingdom one that shall not be destroyed'. Only later would His sacrificial death become associated with the word gospel.

Christ, in using the phrase 'the Kingdom of Heaven' was pointing to its Heavenly origin, to its conception and planning through eternity, in order to differentiate between it, as the Kingdom of Heavenly purity, and the earthly kingdoms of that age. Thus Christ stressed the need for repentance, and forgiveness of sins in order to enter that 'heavenly kingdom', which would not be exactly the same, physically, as their land at that time.

For Millenia that land had been fought over, abandoned, abused, and overgrazed to the point where its inherent fertility was almost lost, and its carefully built terraces fallen into decay. All this, which was quite apparent, would, in God's Kingdom, be

reconstructed by the worldwide earth movements at Christ's arrival, into gently sloping land stretching away from Jerusalem in all directions, where each family would be granted their own acres, sufficient to provide all their needs when God will provide both rain and sunshine in due season. Micah 4:4, 'but they shall sit every man under his vine and under his fig tree, and no one shall make them afraid, for the mouth of the LORD of hosts has spoken'. Amos 9:13-15, "Behold, the days are coming," declares the LORD, "when the plowman will overtake the reaper and the treader of grapes, the sower of seed. The mountains will drip with sweet wine, with which all the hills will flow. I will restore My people Israel from captivity; they will rebuild and inhabit the ruined cities. They will plant vineyards and drink their wine; they will make gardens and eat their fruit. I will firmly plant them in their own land, never again to be uprooted from the land that I have given them,"

The listeners could not get enough of this thrilling news!

Jerusalem will be set on high, with a wonderful river which flows both East and West from the Temple, which will expand and enliven the Dead Sea and produce a rich harvest of fish, as well as watering the land. Ezekiel 47:8-12, 'And he said to me, "This water flows out to the eastern region and goes down into the Arabah. When it empties into the Sea, the water there becomes fresh. Wherever the river flows, there will be swarms of living creatures and a great number of fish, because it flows there and makes the waters fresh; so wherever the river flows, everything will flourish. Fishermen will stand by the shore; from En-gedi to En-eglaim they will spread their nets to catch fish of many kinds, like the fish of the Great Sea. But the swamps and marshes will not become fresh; they will be left for salt. Along both banks of the river, fruit trees of all kinds will grow. Their leaves will not wither, and their fruit will not fail. Each month they will bear fruit, because the water from the sanctuary flows to them. Their fruit will be used for food and their leaves for healing." This water will enter the Dead sea, and fill it until it overflows and reaches South to the ocean, symbolically picturing the worldwide availability of God's Holy Spirit, but also vastly improving the climate of God's Holy Land.

Christ explained that there will be no more war, no more armies or oppression once the Kingdom is established, for He will rule with unlimited power and justice, assisted by His Bride, the Saints, who will lead the people in transforming the deserts with God's power, Isaiah 35:1-2,6-7, 'The desert and the parched land will be glad; the wilderness will rejoice and blossom. Like the crocus, it will burst into bloom; it will rejoice greatly and shout for joy. The glory of Lebanon will be given to it, the

splendour of Carmel and Sharon; they will see the glory of the LORD, the splendour of our God. 6-7,

The burning sand will become a pool, the thirsty ground bubbling springs. In the haunts where jackals once lay, grass and reeds and papyrus will grow.

Then will the lame leap like a deer, and the mute tongue shout for joy. Water will gush forth in the wilderness and streams in the desert.

Isaiah 41:18-20, 'I will open rivers on the bare heights, and fountains in the midst of the valleys.

I will make the wilderness a pool of water, and the dry land springs of water.

I will put in the wilderness the cedar, the acacia, the myrtle, and the olive.

I will set in the desert the cypress, the plane and the pine together, that they may see and know, may consider and understand together, that the hand of the LORD has done this, the Holy One of Israel has created it.

This was like water to those perishing of thirst! Christ's teaching was totally unlike the oppressive teaching of the self serving religious authorities! This was the **Good News** of the Kingdom of God! The miracles of healing and the provision of food simply backed up Christ's authority to promise these things. Here was Divine power on display, which even the Pharisees recognised, John 3:1-2, 'Now there was a man of the Pharisees named Nicodemus, a ruler of the Jews. This man came to Jesus by night and said to him, "Rabbi, **we know** that you are a teacher come from God, for no one can do these signs that you do unless God is with him."

No doubt Christ would have had to explain to His eager followers that in the Kingdom of God the whole nation of Israel, the entire 12 tribes, will be re-united, Ezekiel 39:25-29,

'Therefore this is what the Lord GOD says: Now I will restore Jacob from captivity and will have compassion on **the whole house of Israel**, and I will be jealous for My holy name. They will forget their disgrace and all the treachery they committed against Me, when they dwell securely in their land, with no one to frighten them. When I bring them back from the peoples and gather them out of the lands of their enemies, I will show My holiness in them in the sight of many nations. Then they will know that I am the LORD their God, when I regather them to their own land, not leaving any of them behind after their exile among the nations. And I will no longer hide My face from them, for I will pour out My Spirit on the house of Israel, declares the Lord GOD.'

Today, the Jews, in their pride, believe *they are* the whole house of Israel, but at the time of Christ it was well known that there were still Israelites as near as Asia Minor, where the Apostle Paul, of the tribe of Benjamin, came from, Philippians 3:5,

‘circumcised on the eighth day, of the people of Israel, **of the tribe of Benjamin**, a Hebrew of Hebrews; as to the law, a Pharisee.’ Most, however had long ago migrated to NW Europe after their captor, Assyria, fell to Babylon in the 700’s BC. Cf. Mathew 10:6, ‘These twelve Jesus sent out with the following instructions: "Do not go among the Gentiles or enter any town of the Samaritans. Go rather to **the lost sheep of Israel**"’.

Purged of unbelievers and rebels (Ezekiel 20: 38), Christ would have told them of the New Covenant and the New Spirit which will then enable them to walk in God’s way once in the land. Jeremiah 31:33, ‘**But this shall be the covenant that I will make with the house of Israel; After those days, saith the LORD, I will put my law in their inward parts, and write it in their hearts; and will be their God, and they shall be my people**’.

Even more thrilling to many would have been the news that Israel’s King David would be their Prince and Shepherd, replacing their oppressors, the Romans and their grasping religious lackeys, Ezekiel 34:23-24,27. ‘**And I will set up over them one shepherd, my servant David, and he shall feed them: he shall feed them and be their shepherd. And I, the LORD, will be their God, and my servant David shall be prince among them. I am the LORD; I have spoken.**’ And verse 27, ‘**And the trees of the field shall yield their fruit, and the earth shall yield its increase, and they shall be secure in their land. And they shall know that I am the LORD, when I break the bars of their yoke, and deliver them from the hand of those who enslaved them.**’

But it was not just the physical blessings which so excited the down-trodden people. It was the fact that Christ would return with great power to rule a world leading Kingdom, where the re-united Israel would at last play the Divinely intended pre-eminent role as God’s pattern or example to the world, bringing great honour and promised glory to the nation. It was all they had hoped for in their wildest dreams, though Christ did not explain the timing!

We don’t know exactly how much information Christ gave to them, but if He explained how he will return leading an angelic army, which would be resisted in vain by the leaders of the world’s armies at Armageddon who refused to lose their power, this would have delighted His listeners, and could well explain the resistance from the Pharisees and Sadducees, who enjoyed *their* power and position too much to even contemplate its loss.

Today, as we read Christ’s Revelation prophecies about the End Time, we can understand why many of the troops then instructed by their leaders to fight against Christ, will refuse, because they will remember the vivid dreams and visions projected by the First Angel of Revelation 14:6-7, ‘**Then I saw another angel flying directly overhead, with an eternal gospel to proclaim to those who dwell on earth, to every nation and tribe and language and people. And he said with a loud voice, “Fear**

God and give him glory, because the hour of his judgment has come, and worship him who made heaven and earth, the sea and the springs of water,” (ie. repent!)

They will know that these are not ‘invaders from space’ as their leaders would have them believe, but a Righteous Christ returning to claim his Kingdom, in which they themselves will long to live, and so, inspired by their memory of the Angel’s message, they will fight instead against their deceived colleagues, as we read in Zechariah 14:13, ‘On that day people will be stricken by the LORD with great panic. They will seize each other by the hand and attack one another.’ NIV.

The rest of Zechariah 14 reveals a world governed by a Kingdom no-one can resist, and at last peace and love will gradually extend worldwide. Isaiah 66:19, ‘and I will set a sign among them. And from them I will send survivors to the nations, to Tarshish, Pul, and Lud, who draw the bow, to Tubal and Javan, to the coastlands far away, that have not heard my fame or seen my glory. And they shall declare my glory among the nations’.

This is the gospel which so entranced Christ’s listeners that they could not wrench themselves away, Isaiah 11:9, ‘They shall not hurt or destroy in all my holy mountain; for the earth shall be full of the knowledge of the LORD as the waters cover the sea.’ No wonder then that when Christ appeared to His disciples after His resurrection for 40 days, His message was still the same, not a message about himself, but once again about His Kingdom, Acts 1:3, ‘He presented Himself to them with many convincing proofs that He was alive. He appeared to them over a span of forty days and spoke about **the kingdom of God.**’

This was always the message Christ delivered: the Kingdom of God and our need to repent in order to prepare ourselves to enter. Let not this pattern be ignored in your teaching: it remains our duty, Luke 9:2, ‘He sent them to preach the kingdom of God.....’ The kingdom of God provides the incentive, the necessary vision which has inspired God’s people for Millenia. Some have instead delivered a message *about* Christ, which by itself falls short of Christ’s example and command, which is why Christ’s brother Jude warned, ‘Beloved, while I was very diligent to write to you concerning our common salvation, I found it necessary to write to you exhorting you to contend earnestly for **the faith which was once for all delivered** to the saints.’ Jude 1:3.

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