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What is the Gospel?



Individual Topics - Steve Gregg

In his message, Steve Gregg explains that there is only one valid Gospel according to Scripture despite various views of what the Gospel is, and both Jesus and Paul preached the same message. The Gospel, meaning good news, refers to the message that Jesus is Lord, and his kingdom is at hand, and it includes the belief that Jesus died for sins and rose again. The purpose of the Gospel is to expand the kingdom of God and bring more people under the kingship of Jesus, and it is intended to transform individual lives and society as a whole.

Transcript

I have been asked to speak on what is the Gospel this morning, and there's a lot of places a person could start in addressing that question, but let me just say, there is only one Gospel, and we'll just start right there. There are some who say otherwise. There are some Christians who say otherwise.

They say there's a Gospel that Jesus preached, and there's a Gospel that Paul preached. I don't know if you're familiar with that particular viewpoint, but it's actually much more common than you know. In fact, it's very possible that some of you go to churches that teach that, even if they haven't taught it overtly enough for you to know that they teach that.

It is an assumption that many have made, that when you read the Gospels, you're reading what Jesus preached, but when you read the epistles of Paul, you're reading something that God revealed to Paul that is somewhat different than what Jesus preached. And this is the idea that Jesus came to preach a certain message to the Jews, a Gospel called the Gospel of the Kingdom, and that the Jews rejected that, and therefore God accommodated their rejection and decided to pull the Gospel out and give another Gospel through Paul, which would go primarily to the Gentiles. And then they believe the time will come when the Gospel that is currently valid, the one that Paul preached, will, it'll be pulled also, because at the rapture of the church, they say there will be no more need for this particular Gospel, and the same Gospel Jesus preached, the Gospel of the Kingdom, will then be preached again.

So the Gospel of the Kingdom is said to be the appropriate Gospel in the time of Jesus and in the time after the church is gone, but in the meantime, the time that we are living in, there's a different Gospel than what Jesus preached. Now, what's the impact of this particular claim? Well, it means that when you read the Sermon on the Mount, you're not really reading something that applies to us. You're reading something that Jesus had in mind for the Jews.

It was part of the Gospel of the Kingdom of God, and they eventually rejected that, so that's not really what's currently God's message to us today. But His message today is not called the Gospel of the Kingdom, but called the Gospel of Grace. Now, if you have never heard any of this, I don't want to confuse you by taking too much of a long time with it.

However, if you have heard this, or you've heard preaching that's based on this assumption, then you may be confused about what the Gospel is according to Scripture. The first thing I'd like to mention is that Paul didn't know anything about two Gospels. He didn't know he was preaching something different than what Jesus preached.

In fact, I think if he did believe that he was preaching something different than what Jesus preached, I think Paul would have regarded himself to be a heretic. Because in 1 Timothy, which Paul wrote, and chapter 6, verse 3, Paul said, If anyone teaches otherwise, and does not consent to wholesome words, even the words of our Lord Jesus Christ, and to the teaching which accords with godliness, he is proud, knowing nothing, but is obsessed with disputes and arguments over words, etc., etc. Now, Paul said if anyone preaches anything different than what Jesus said, they are ignorant.

Paul did not regard himself to be ignorant. He did say, we know in part, and we prophesy in part, and we all have ignorance of some things, but certainly Paul did not consider himself ignorant of the Gospel. He had a life calling in preaching the Gospel, and he certainly did not believe that he was called to preach something different from what Jesus preached.

Now it is true that the Gospel in the Bible is frequently called the Gospel of the Kingdom. Jesus said in Matthew 24, 14, This Gospel of the Kingdom must be preached in all the world as a witness to all nations, and then the end will come. So it is obvious that this Gospel of the Kingdom is the message that someone better preach to the whole world if we hope for the end to eventually come.

Because he said that Gospel will be preached in all the world before the end comes. Now, there are other terms for the Gospel. For example, there is the expression the Gospel of the Grace of God.

Now those who think there are two Gospels say that Paul is the one who introduced and preached the Gospel of the Grace of God, and that that is different from the Gospel of

the Kingdom. But again, I don't think Paul was aware of this. In fact, I know he was not, because in Acts chapter 20, he was speaking to the elders of the Church of Ephesus, sort of a farewell address, and he said this to them in Acts 20 verses 24 and 25.

He said, But none of these things move me, nor do I count my life dear to myself, so that I may finish my race with joy, and the ministry which I received from the Lord Jesus to testify to the Gospel of the Grace of God. So this is where we get the idea that Paul preached the Gospel of Grace. He said, I've been called of Christ to preach the Gospel of the Grace of God.

But his very next sentence says, And indeed, now I know that you all, among whom I've gone preaching the kingdom of God, will see my face no more. So he said he's been preaching the Gospel of the Grace of God, and the very next breath he says, I've been preaching the kingdom of God. Obviously, there's no difference between the teaching of the kingdom of God, which Jesus preached, and the Gospel of Grace.

The kingdom of God is a kingdom of grace, to be sure. But they're not different Gospels. In fact, in Galatians chapter 1 and verse 8, Paul said, If we or an angel from heaven would preach unto you any other gospel than we have preached to you, let him be accursed.

Now this makes it very clear Paul's only aware of one valid gospel. No one could legitimately preach another without commending Paul's curse. So let's not assume that what Jesus preached is relevant to some other age than our own, and to some other people than ourselves and our neighbors, and recognize that the gospel that is for all people, the one of which Jesus said in Mark 16, this, you know, preach the gospel to every creature.

This goes to the Jew and to the Gentile, and it's for all time. In fact, in Revelation 14, the gospel is referred to as the everlasting gospel. Now that phrase, the everlasting gospel, suggests that there's only one for all time.

It's eternal. It's not, you know, this gospel for this time, this other gospel for another time. Now if none of that was an issue to you, I apologize for taking up your time talking about all that, but it is the case that this is widely assumed to be true.

And what is the ramification of that? Well, many people assume that what Paul preached is a gospel of salvation that is merely a matter of getting a means of escaping God's wrath and finding favor on the day of judgment. In other words, what we call justification. Justification in the Bible is a legal word.

It's like the word acquittal in our court system. Today, if a person goes to court and they're accused of something, one of two things can happen, besides a mistrial. One can be that they are acquitted, which means they are declared not guilty, or at least have

not been proven to be guilty, and therefore they are free, free of the charges.

The other is that they will be convicted of the crime. Now so where are the words acquitted and convicted from the courtroom? In the Bible times, the words most common, especially in the time when the English Bible was first translated, are the words justified and condemned. But they have the same meaning.

The word justification does mean acquitted, and the word condemned means convicted, just like the parallel to the modern concept. So when we talk about justification, this is talking about when we stand before God and we have to answer for our lives, because the Bible does say every idle word a man speaks, he should give account of it in the day of judgment. It seems that all are condemned.

You know, everybody has done things that would be an embarrassment to have brought up before the throne of God on the last day. And the greatest fear that we probably should have is that we would not be acquitted at that bar of justice. When we stand before God, we should want very much for him to say, not guilty.

I see you as clean. I see you as innocent. That's called justification.

That's being justified at God's, in God's court. The other option is to be condemned. And that would be, of course, to go to the lake of fire, as the Bible makes very clear.

So we have this concern, and it is a great concern, obviously. I mean, it cannot be overstated how great that concern is. It has eternal ramifications.

But there are some who think that Paul's only concern was with this matter of getting justified. Because justification is the, we could say the gate or the door into heaven or into salvation. That is to say, after we die, it's the way of escaping hell.

And therefore, because everybody is, who's mentally sane and spiritually alert, knows that you want to be on God's good side when that day comes. People are looking for a means of justification. And in many evangelical circles, including the one I was raised in, I was raised in an evangelical home and an evangelical church.

And I've been a follower of Christ since I was young, as a child. But I wasn't always taught clearly some of the things that I came to understand as I studied the Bible when I became an adult. And I certainly had the idea, and I think many Christians who are evangelicals do, that as long as I have my ticket to heaven, as long as I have the pass that God gives that says, okay, show me your pass, show me the stamp on your hand, okay, you're in free admittance into heaven.

As long as I have that, I have all I can hope for. That I have all that God offers. I have everything God is concerned about.

In other words, there wasn't very much clarity in my mind as to what the gospel, what ramifications the gospel had for my life now. What am I supposed to do now? No one, no preacher ever put it so crassly, but I had the impression that now that I've got my ticket, I just have to, you know, hang around and wait for either Jesus to come back or till I die and go before God. And then that ticket will kick in.

It'll, you know, it'll, the thing I've been holding on to in my back pocket there for so many years will now be proven to be worthwhile. However, since I do have that ticket in my back pocket because I believe in Christ, it was hard to explain why I ought to behave in a righteous way. Because I was also taught, of course, that justification, and I was correctly taught this, justification is by grace, through faith.

Paul said that, obviously, in Ephesians 2, 8 and 9, by grace you're saved, through faith. And that not of yourselves, it is the gift of God, not of works, lest any man should boast. But I often had just quoted those two verses without quoting the next verse, which is verse 10, Ephesians 2, 10, says, for we are his workmanship created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God has foreordained that we should walk in them.

Now, walking is what I'm doing right now. I'm living my life. That's a metaphor.

The word walking is a metaphor for living. And God has foreordained good works for me to walk in. Now, I don't suppose I was ever taught otherwise than that Christians ought to be good.

Christians ought to, you know, maybe keep the Ten Commandments or maybe even under better preaching, ought to love each other as we love our neighbor as ourself. But it was never very clear why that would be really necessary or how that even fits into the gospel message. Sure, I guess we should do the good things better than doing the bad thing.

But is that really part of the gospel or is that kind of a secondary thing? Is it like optional? If I believe in Jesus and I'm justified by grace through faith, I've got my ticket to heaven. I mean, good works. Sure.

I mean, anyone could be commended for doing good things instead of bad things. But is that really optional? Is that really part of the gospel or what? Well, this is what many evangelical churches understand to be the gospel of grace. By grace, we are saved.

And by saved, they mean we're justified. We have forgiveness of sins. And that's the most we can hope for.

That's all God wants. He just wants everyone to jump through that particular hoop and have that ticket so that someday we'll live in heaven forever with Jesus. Now, when I became a Bible teacher, which was 50 years ago this year, or actually 50 years ago last year, it's been 51 years now.

I started teaching the Bible, and I've been a vocational Bible teacher for that long. I had to study. I had to look at the Bible because I teach verse by verse.

I had to actually make sure I knew what it was saying. You look pretty stupid if you are a vocational Bible teacher going verse by verse and you really don't know what it's saying. So it was my desire to really understand Paul and Jesus and the Bible before I would teach others because teachers have a stricter judgment than other people do, and I didn't want that.

So I found that Jesus didn't talk about going to heaven. I had thought that he did because I found frequently in the New Testament references to the kingdom of heaven. And Jesus said how hard it is for a rich man to enter the kingdom of heaven.

And, you know, said to the scribes and Pharisees, or he said to his disciples, unless your righteousness exceeds the righteousness of the scribes and Pharisees, you'll by no means enter the kingdom of heaven. And Jesus said not everyone who says me Lord, Lord, will enter the kingdom of heaven. Now entering the kingdom of heaven, I assume, meant going to heaven because after all kingdom of heaven sounds like, you know, the kingdom that is heaven.

At least that's how I understood it. Until again I studied the Bible. I realized that it's interesting this term kingdom of heaven, if it really is talking about heaven, then Jesus only talked about heaven in Gospel of Matthew because that's the only place in the Bible you find the term kingdom of heaven.

Matthew's gospel, Luke, Mark, John, the epistles, nowhere mentioned a kingdom of heaven. They do, however, frequently mention something called the kingdom of God. And as I studied, I realized that when Matthew refers to the kingdom of heaven, if the same statement is found in Luke or Mark, and it frequently is, there it says the kingdom of God, not the kingdom of heaven.

In other words, the very same statement of Jesus recorded in Matthew would have the term kingdom of heaven where the same statement in any other place in the Bible would say kingdom of God, which made me realize, okay, kingdom of heaven is another for kingdom of God. Matthew used the term kingdom of heaven frequently. The other gospels use the term kingdom of God interchangeably with it.

In fact, Matthew himself uses them interchangeably because in Matthew chapter 19, Jesus said, how hard it is for a rich man to enter the kingdom of heaven. And again, I say to you, so he's repeating himself again, I said to you, it's easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle than for a rich man to enter the kingdom of God. Now he, Jesus says he was saying the same thing twice.

First time he mentioned it's hard for a rich man to enter the kingdom of heaven. Second

time, he used the term kingdom of God, interchangeable terms. Now I think some who see this might say, okay, now I understand the word kingdom of God means heaven because it's the same as the kingdom of heaven.

It's just another term for heaven. But when you actually read what Jesus preached and Paul too, for that matter, you'll find that the term kingdom of heaven and kingdom of God are not describing somewhere other than here or some time other than our lifetimes. People entered the kingdom of heaven or the kingdom of God when they became followers of Christ.

So that Paul said to the Colossians in Colossians 1:13, that God has translated us out of the power of darkness into the kingdom of his own dear son. That happened when we were converted. We were translated out of one kingdom, the kingdom of darkness into another kingdom, the kingdom of Christ, the kingdom of God.

The kingdom is called the kingdom of Christ. It's called the kingdom of God. It's called the kingdom of heaven.

It's also called the kingdom of Christ and God. But there's only one kingdom, no matter what term Paul or Jesus uses, they're always talking about the same kingdom. And this is the kingdom message that is to preach all the world before the end comes, Jesus said, the gospel.

Now, the word gospel means good news. There's all kinds of good news. In fact, the Greek word for gospel is eugalion.

And that word was in existence in the Greek language before, before the new testament was written, before you ever heard the word gospel preached by Jesus or Paul or anyone else. It was an ordinary Greek word, not a religious word. When we think of the word gospel, we think specifically of preachers in church and evangelists preaching about Jesus.

But the word gospel in the Greek language, which is the language, the new test was written in. It actually had an established meaning. It's something like good tidings or good, an announcement of good news.

And it was commonly used in situations that had no religious connotations at all. Before the gospels were written before Jesus came, the word eugalion would speak of usually an official announcement. Perhaps a town crier would get into the, into the public square and make a public announcement.

You know, if it was good news, it's maybe the king has declared a tax holiday for everybody. No one has to pay taxes for the next month or something. I mean, that'd be good news.

Or, or if a kingdom whose king had never had a child and they're worried about the succession of the throne. If the king had a son, a cry would go and say, good news. A son has been born to the king.

That's the kind of thing that word eugalion meant. Good tidings, just an announcement of something positive as opposed to something bad. Now that's the word that Jesus used.

In fact, it's even used in the Greek old Testament. When it says in Isaiah 52, how beautiful upon the mountains are the feet of him who brings good news. Now the old Testament is written in Hebrew, but it was also translated into Greek before Jesus was born.

And the Greek old Testament has the word eugalion who brings the gospel. And Paul even quoted that verse from Isaiah 52 twice in his writings and applied it himself, preaching the gospel. Now the gospel then is good news.

It's not specifically religious news. At least that's not the inherent meaning of the word. It's, it could be political news.

As a matter of fact, when Jesus first began to preach the very first words recorded of Jesus as an adult are found in Matt and Mark one 15. And in Mark one 15, it says that Jesus said the time is fulfilled and the kingdom of God is at hand. Repent therefore, and believe the good news, the gospel, what gospel? Well, what do you just said? The time is fulfilled and the kingdom of God is at hand.

That's good news. Okay, but what does it mean? Now, if you've been thinking the kingdom of God or the kingdom of heaven just refers to where you go after you die, then you would say, well, how, in what sense did the kingdom of God had it drawn near it actually in the, in the, in the new Testament Greek, it says the kingdom of God has drawn near the time is fulfilled, which means that something was expected. This was predicted before there's been a long wait, but now that time is behind us and the time is fulfilled.

It is time for that promise to be realized. The kingdom of God has drawn near, which to our mind doesn't communicate much unless we know the old Testament, but to the Jews, it meant a great deal because the kingdom of God is what the Jews, at least the righteous Jews were greatly desirous of the kingdom of God. Let me put it really briefly because this is what the gospel is about.

It's a good news about the kingdom, the kingdom of God first in the old Testament referred to the nation of Israel. When God brought Israel out of Egypt to Mount Sinai, he made a covenant with them. And he said in Exodus 19, five and six, he said, if you will obey my voice, indeed, he's speaking to the community of the, of the rescued slaves

from Egypt.

If you will obey my voice indeed, and keep my covenant, then you'll be a peculiar treasure unto me above all nations for all the earth is mine. And you'll be a kingdom to me, a kingdom of priests and a holy nation. Now notice the kingdom and nation are identical terms.

A kingdom by definition is a nation that's governed by a king, as opposed to say America, which is not governed by a king, but in ancient times, all nations were governed by kings. This idea of people, you know, having self-rule or having a constitution or, you know, having a parliament or a Congress to make their laws. That's all very new stuff.

If you're young, you need to know that that didn't, that wasn't around before the founding of America a few hundred years ago. In ancient times, every nation was a kingdom. The word kingdom is an abbreviation of the term king's domain, king domain.

It's the domain, it's the realm that a king rules over. It is the people and the territory that the king rules over and any nation that had a king was a kingdom. Now, Jesus said, excuse me, God said to Israel at Mount Sinai, if you'll obey me, in other words, if you'll do what people are supposed to do toward their king, obey and keep my covenant, then you'll be my kingdom and you'll be my holy nation.

The word holy means set apart from others. So you'll be a kingdom of mine, a nation of mine, different from all other nations. And that's the first time the Bible ever speaks of God having the slightest interest in having a kingdom.

Prior to that, there were righteous people like Noah and Enoch and even Moses before that time and Abraham, Isaac and Jacob. There are righteous people, but there was no kingdom. There was no nation that was God's nation.

That's what happened when he brought them out of Egypt. He established a nation of people right here on this planet who were to be his nation, his kingdom, obedient to him uniquely so that other nations had their own kings, but God would be Israel's king. Now, that worked out pretty well for them for several hundred years.

Eventually, they decided they wanted to be like the other nations and they wanted to have a regular earthly king. They came to Samuel the prophet and said, we've decided we want a regular king from now on. This after hundreds of years, 450 years or so of living as God's kingdom with no earthly king because God was their king.

The nation was his kingdom and he was their king. But then they said, well, we want another king. We want a regular kind of king.

We'd like a man to be our king. And when Samuel prayed and asked God about this, God

said, give them what they want. They have not rejected you.

They've rejected me that I should not reign over them. Now you have to realize what an amazing statement that is. God says about his own people, they have rejected me that I should not reign over them.

What does God reigning over people mean? It means he's their king and it means that he makes the laws, he sets the agenda and the people are loyal to him and support his rule and his agenda and keep his laws. That's what a kingdom is, a group of people loyal to and obedient to a king. Israel decided they didn't want that.

They wanted a regular king. And so God gave them a king, Saul, who turned out to be a bad king. So he replaced him with David, who was a pretty good king, better than any others that they had.

And God was so pleased with David. He told David, you know, from your descendants, I'm going to raise up a seed and I'm going to establish his kingdom forever. And this was a reference to what Jews refer to as the Messiah.

The word Messiah means the anointed one and so-called because when God established Saul and David as kings, a prophet would pour oil over their head, a symbol of the Holy Spirit coming upon them. And that was the ceremony of anointing of a king. It's the installation of a king.

So Saul was installed as the king. David was installed as the king. And there would be another that would be installed, anointed to be king, the anointed one.

And this is what the word Messiah actually means in the Hebrew. The Greek form of that name, meaning the same thing, anointed one, is Christos, from which we get the English word Christ in our translations. So Christ and Messiah are equivalent words.

One is in Hebrew and one's in Greek. And we, in our Bibles, generally speaking, have it from the Greek in the New Testament, which is written in Greek. So we call it Christ, the Christ, the Messiah.

We have to understand what the word Christ means. It means the anointed king. This was what God promised to Israel, that he's going to send a descendant of David.

And by the way, the Messiah came to be called son of David. There were people who recognized Jesus in this role, and they said, son of David, the two blind men outside Jericho, son of David, have mercy on us. When Jesus cast out demons on occasion in Matthew 12, the Jews said, could this be the son of David? Now, they're not just interested in his ancestry.

The term son of David meant the Messiah. And after David, there were other kings of

Israel and Judah, but most of them were bad. And so bad, in fact, that the nation departed from God, completely worshipped idols, and God had to send them into captivity for 70 years.

Only a remnant of them came back and established the nation of Israel again after that 70 years, but it never really was a free people. They were always under pagan dominion. They were first, when they got re-established, they were first under the Persians, then the Greeks, then the Syrians, and then the Romans, and so forth.

And yet, during that time, and even the time before their captivity, the prophets of God told Israel that he's going to send the Messiah. He's going to establish a kingdom. He's going to establish a godly kingdom again among his people, as he had done at Mount Sinai when Israel became his kingdom.

But remember, all this time, the word kingdom does not refer to anything happens after you die. It refers to God having his own separate nation of people that are his own kingdom. He's their king, and they follow him as their king.

Now, the Jews anticipated this, and therefore, when Jesus came and said, the time is fulfilled and the kingdom of God has drawn near, this meant very specifically that the long wait for God to come and re-establish his kingdom among his people and be their king again was now passed, and now the kingdom that they've been anticipating was near. But what is the kingdom? It's the people of God, a holy nation, not an ethnic nation, not even a political nation, a spiritual nation, so that Peter, writing to the church in 1 Peter 2, verses 9 and 10, he says, for you are a chosen generation, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a peculiar people. Now, those are all terms that God used of Israel when they were his kingdom in the Old Testament.

They were a peculiar people, special, a holy nation, a chosen race. Those are the terms that Peter now uses of the church. The church is the followers of Jesus, and by church, we need to make sure, I may not need to with this crowd, but in most cases, I have to make it very clear.

I'm not talking about a building. I'm not talking about a 501c3. I'm not talking about any institutional denomination or movement.

I'm not talking about the Catholic Church or any Protestant Church or the Eastern Orthodox Church or the Coptic Churches in Africa. We're talking about the body of Christ, which is global, and it is not defined by any particular institutional label. It is a spiritual phenomenon.

It is made up of those who have embraced Christ as their king, or as it's sometimes used in Scripture, as Lord. Now, we know that the word Lord is a term used for but sometimes that's all we really know about the word. The word Lord was a very common word before

America was founded.

In all of Europe and most other places, there were lords, and lords had servants. A person who owned slaves was called a lord, a master. If they didn't have slaves, they might have hired servants, or they might have people that answered to them.

That's a lord was. Now, when this nation was founded, it was founded on the idea they don't want any kings or any lords. Everybody who came to this country initially had been under such rule from human lords and kings, and it wasn't such a pretty thing.

They wanted to escape from that. So what has happened in the past two or three hundred years is that we have generations of people who have never known what a king is, never known what a lord is. Well, some of the ancestors of our black friends have known what a lord is, unfortunately.

We had a horrible institution called slavery in this country for a long time, and the person who's a lord is like a master. Now, of course, we think only negatively about slavery because of the horrible way it was done in this nation, but in ancient times, all nations had slaves. It wasn't usually racist.

It wasn't whites and blacks or something like that. People were, they would enslave people of their own race, and it was more of an economic institution in biblical times that a man who couldn't support his family would sell himself into slavery, and he might sell himself into slavery to his neighbor. You know, he'd get economic security that way, but he'd give up his freedom.

And the person he sold himself to is called a lord. Now, the Bible says about us that we are not our own. We've been bought with a price.

Paul said that in 1 Corinthians chapter 6. He says, do you not know that you're not your own? You've been bought with a price. You're the temple of God. You're a holy temple.

You belong to him, and we're told that we are his kingdom. As I mentioned earlier, in Colossians, Paul says that Christ, or God, has translated us into the kingdom of his son. So we are in the kingdom, and Paul said in Romans chapter 14, verse 17, the kingdom of God is righteousness and peace and joy in the Holy Spirit.

This is a kingdom that you enter through spiritual birth. You hold membership through spiritual status of rebirth, and the spiritual experience you have in the kingdom is that you now possess righteousness, peace, and joy in the Holy Spirit. These are fruits of the Spirit.

Now, this is what the kingdom is, and to put it all together, what we're saying is that Jesus came to be the king and the lord, and anybody in Israel, and then later the Gentiles were made the same offer, but initially Jesus only preached to Jews. Everyone in Israel

who would receive him as their king on those terms would be part of his kingdom, would be in his kingdom. He'd be their king or lord.

Eventually, the Gentiles were afforded this same privilege. Now, someone would say, why is that good news? I mean, I'm a free person now. What do I need a lord for? Why do I need a king? Isn't it better, you know, being free? Well, it'd great if you could be free, but you can't be.

You're in one kingdom or another. People are born under the power of Satan's kingdom, with Satan ruling. When Jesus was accused of casting out demons by the power of Beelzebub, the prince of demons, Jesus said, if Satan is casting out Satan, his kingdom will not stand, but if I'm casting out demons by the Spirit of God, then the kingdom of God has come upon you.

He's not talking about something they're going to die and go to. It's something that had come to them, and he contrasted with the kingdom of Satan. If Satan's casting out Satan, his kingdom is going down, but my kingdom is coming up.

The kingdom of God has overtaken you. It's here. You can see by the fact I'm casting out the devils out of people.

Satan is not in power here anymore. I am. In Luke chapter 17 and verse 20, the Pharisees said to Jesus, they demanded of him, when will the kingdom of God appear? Now notice again, they weren't thinking of the kingdom of God as something that's invisible.

You go away when you die and go to heaven. They were looking for the kingdom of God that was promised in the Old Testament, an earthly restoration of people who were loyal to Christ as his kingdom, as his holy nation here on earth among the nations of the world. That's what the kingdom was and is.

And they said, when will the kingdom appear? And he said, well, the kingdom doesn't come with observation. Men will not be able to say low here or low there, but the kingdom of God is in your midst. It's right here in the crowd.

Right here, the king is standing among you, and some of his subjects are right here in the crowd. His kingdom is here, and it's in your midst. See, people who follow Jesus as their king are his subjects.

People who embrace him as Lord really the same concept, are his servants. We've been bought with a price, we belong to him. Now that's the good news.

Now again, not everyone sees that as good news. That's why not everyone received the gospel even when Jesus preached there, when Paul did. In fact, he got run out of town more often than not.

But you know, the gospel is that Jesus is the Lord and that he's the king, and the kingdom beckons all who will to submit to him and to be part of his kingdom, where there is righteousness and peace and joy in holy spirit, and where there is eternal life too. It's an eternal kingdom. Therefore, it doesn't end when you die.

If you get in now, you'll still be in after you die forever and ever and ever. It's an eternal kingdom. Certainly has important ramifications in the next life, but what we hear less about, and what Jesus and Paul talk more about, are the ramifications in this life.

Jesus, it's very difficult to comb through all the statements of Jesus or even Paul and find very many that talk anything about the next life. They did believe in it, and it was mentioned, sometimes Jesus said, what shall it profit a man if he gains the whole world and loses his soul? Probably thinking in terms of eternal condemnation. Jesus said, you know, it's better to, you know, if your eye makes you sin, better to pluck it out and cast it under than to, and to enter into life that way than to enter into Gehenna, where the worm does not die and the fire is not quenched.

I mean, there are no doubt a number of passages that speak of the next life. Paul said, while we're present in the body, we're absent from the Lord, but we're willing, yea, eager to be absent from the body, to be present with the Lord. That certainly is in the next life.

So you do find at least a handful of verses in the New Testament that talk about the next life, but it's like, it's almost like a side issue. When you read the teachings of Jesus, especially in Matthew, Mark, and Luke, they're almost always about how to live in obedience to God and Christ as subjects of him as their king. The Sermon on the Mount, the longest sermon of Jesus recorded, and is all about practical living.

There's not anything in there necessarily about how to get saved and go to heaven, but it's about how to live, how to forgive your enemies, how to love your enemies, how to, you know, not take your brother to court, and not to look with lust at your neighbor's wife, and not to be angry at your brother, and things like that. Jesus taught how to live in almost every statement he opened his mouth and spoke. His parables were about the kingdom, because that was the gospel, the kingdom.

He said the kingdom of God is like this, and he'd compare it with some homey thing like a woman making bread, putting yeast in the dough, or a man planting a field, and another man sowing in seeds that were going to corrupt the crop, you know, those kinds of things. A king making a wedding for his son, a vineyard that the owner leases out to people, and he wants them to produce the fruit, and they don't, and stuff like that. These are very common earthly analogies he told, but he said the kingdom of God is like that.

And of course, the people mostly didn't understand how the kingdom of God was like that, even the disciples didn't, and so they'd ask him, explain to us this parable, and the Bible says he would explain privately to them, because he says, unto you it's given to

know the secrets, the mysteries of the kingdom of God, but to the crowds not so much. So it says in Mark chapter 4 and verse 34, it says he did not speak to the crowds without a parable, but when he was alone with his disciples, he expounded everything to them privately. Now, this is the message, the kingdom of God.

What is the good news? The good news is that Jesus is king. How do we respond to that goodness? Well, if we believe the gospel, remember Jesus said the kingdom of God is in hand, repent and believe the gospel. Repent means you're going to have to change your mind about who you're following, because repent means change your mind.

Metanoia in the Greek means to change your mind. We're commanded, John the Baptist commanded people, Jesus commanded people, Paul commands people to repent, and repent means change your mind. But about what? I've changed my mind about a lot of things in my lifetime.

Does that make me a Christian? No, there's something very specific you have to change your mind about. When you learn that Jesus is king, you're learning something you didn't know before. You thought you were in charge of your life.

You thought you were the one who had to make the decisions for your life. You were somebody else. I mean, you might have been loyal to somebody else and let them run your life for you, but you change your mind about who's king, who's ruler, who you have to live to please, who you need to obey.

You know, when I was a kid, I heard people say, you can't please everybody, so you got to at least please yourself. That's the wrong answer. You can't please everybody, so you have to please God.

You have to please Christ, because that is who's in charge. You are not in charge. You don't have to please yourself.

You are living to please God, if you are in his kingdom, just like a subject of a king. Is loyal to his king, wishes to obey. Now, Jesus said, repent and believe the good news.

What happens if you really believe that Jesus is the king? Well, if you really believe it, you're either going to rebel against it, but that's already ruled out, because you've already repented. You're going to live like he's your king. You're going to obey him.

Now, the kingdom, Jesus says, is going to be like a city on a hill that cannot be hid, like a light that you put on a lampstand to give light to the whole world. The purpose of the kingdom of God, or I should say the purpose of us as members of the kingdom of God, is to expand that kingdom. Daniel interpreted Nebuchadnezzar's dream in Daniel chapter two in an interesting way.

You may know the passage. Anyone who's read much about Bible prophecy probably has

heard someone expound this particular passage. It's kind of a key to understanding prophetic history.

Nebuchadnezzar, the king of Babylon, had a dream where he saw an image with a head of gold, a chest of silver, a belly of bronze, and legs of iron, feet of iron and clay. And then he saw a stone that came and struck the image in the feet and toppled it. And then the stone began to grow into a great mountain, and it consumed the gold and the silver and the bronze and the iron.

And they became like dust and the wind blew them away. And then the stone had become such a great mountain, it filled the whole earth. Now, Nebuchadnezzar had no idea what this meant.

So Daniel was called in to interpret it, and he did. He said, well, king, you're the head of gold. You're the Babylonian emperor.

Your empire and you are the head of gold. After you, there's gonna be another empire come up. That's the chest of silver.

And as it turned out, historically, that was the media Persian empire. And they said, after that, there's gonna be one that's the belly of bronze, which turned out to be Alexander the Great and the Grecian empire that conquered the Persians. Then he said, and then the last one, the legs of iron, we know that replaced the Grecian empire.

That was the Roman empire. Then he said, in the days of these kings, the God of heaven will set up a kingdom. The God of heaven will set up a kingdom.

That's the kingdom of the God of heaven or the kingdom of God or the kingdom of heaven. These are all good terms for it. The God of heaven is gonna set up his own kingdom in the days of these kings.

What kings? Certainly the last of the ones in the image. The stone represents God's kingdom, which is an empire, even as the others are empires, and it hits them and crushes them and absorbs them and grows into a great mountain to fill the earth. There's a time Revelation chapter 11 verse 15 says when it will be announced, the kingdoms of this world have become the kingdoms of our Lord and of his Messiah, and he will reign forever.

Christ's kingdom is a growing proposition. And in Daniel said that this kingdom is gonna grow into a great mountain to fill the whole earth. How does it grow? It grows by bringing in more subjects to the king.

You see, the world that we're born into and live in today is a battleground. We who live in America are comfortable enough to sometimes forget that. I know we all have our trials, we have our discomforts, but nothing like ancient times and nothing like many people

throughout the world have right now.

We are prosperous. We have good health facilities. Most of us sitting here are healthy, and if we're not, we know what to do about it.

Weather's wonderful. We are very privileged people. I mean, you hear a lot about white privilege.

I just say American privilege is what really defines privilege, doesn't matter what color you are. If you live in America, you live in the freest country in the world, the most prosperous country in the world. You've got more benefits than kings had in ancient Israel or Babylon or Medea or Persia or any, no kings of the past had indoor plumbing like you do or a light switch on the wall.

I mean, even toilet paper, you know. I'm not sure what they used back then, but I've heard various things, which I would not like to exchange for the toilet paper in my bathroom. The truth is we are the most comfortable, most pampered, most wealthy people who've ever lived, and that's true of us as Christians too.

I mean, it's true of non-Christians. It's true of Americans in general, but we are American Christians for the most part here. I assume we all are.

And therefore, we have known very little of the fatigue of battle. Paul told Timothy, endure hardship like a good soldier of Jesus Christ. He said, no one who goes to war entangles himself in the affairs of this life that he might please him that called him to be a soldier.

You see, being in the kingdom of God is being brought into, naturalized into a nation that's war with the kingdom of darkness. The New Testament indicates that this life before Jesus comes is a battleground. A lot of people aren't told that when they're evangelized.

They're just told, accept Jesus and you'll go to heaven when you die. Oh yeah, and before that, you've got a very angry and very nasty enemy called Satan and his kingdom and his people dominate the planet for the most part. And you're called to be part of an invasion force, a kingdom that's planted on this earth from God that is out to conquer the nations for Christ.

Jesus said, go and make disciples of all the nations because all authority, that means kingship and rulership, all authority has been given to me in heaven and earth. So what's our task? It's to preach the gospel of the kingdom, to let people know there is another king. You know, everybody knows the statement, Jesus is the Christ.

And many times, even people with a very watered down understanding of the gospel will say, well, you know, Paul just said, believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, you'll be saved. So

it's just a matter of, you know, just belief, right? Yeah, just a matter of belief in the Lord, Jesus Christ, which means king. You know, we sometimes think, oh, if you just say a simple prayer and say, I believe in Jesus, you're going to go to heaven.

Well, what do you believe about Jesus? You believe he's here to pamper you? You think he's here to simply rescue you for your own good? Or does he have a purpose? Is he a king? Is he a king at war with a rival kingdom? He is that. And when you become part of his kingdom, you're enlisted and you have to endure hardship as a good soldier. It's worth it, I'll guarantee you.

Sometimes people say, well, we're be living like king's kids. That's a statement I think only American Christians can get away with saying, because we already live like kings, whether we're Christians or not. We live better than kings.

But the truth is, it's not the case that we are king's kids and therefore should live like king's kids. Yes, we are the children of the king, but that king is at war and we are his troops. And when the king is at war, his children, if they're in the army, are out on the battlefield.

They're enduring hardship as soldiers. When the battle is over, when the battle is won, then the children get to go home to the palace. Until then, Paul said that, you know, we might have to be poor.

We might have to be afflicted. Paul certainly put his money where his mouth was. He lived in poverty.

He served Christ. He went to prison. He was beaten many times.

Eventually, he was beheaded for Christ. Most of the apostles were killed for Christ. That's what it meant to be a Christian.

Now, it doesn't mean that all the time for us. That is martyrdom, because many Christians in America live all their lives without ever being martyred. But the other aspects of being in the kingdom of God are not changed.

They're still a king. When Paul went to Thessalonica, according to Acts chapter 17, he preached this gospel. And here's how it was summarized, that this Jesus whom I preached to you is the Christ or Messiah or King, anointed King.

And the people were upset because they thought this was a politically subversive message. They went and accused the apostles before the magistrates, saying, these people are saying there's another king, one Jesus. They're speaking things contrary to Caesar.

Well, they were right, they weren't trying to overthrow Caesar, at least not in the way

that you'd think. But they were saying there's another king, Jesus. That's where the people get that, because they said Jesus.

Paul said Jesus is the Christ. The word Christ refers to an anointed King. They understood that.

He made it clear. We don't understand that. Sometimes we just think Christ, that's Jesus' last name.

And Lord, I don't know what we think that means. We just call that another name for Jesus too. But when Paul said in Romans 10, 9, if you confess with your mouth that Jesus is Lord and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved.

Paul said you become saved when you confess that Jesus is Lord. Why? Because that's the gospel. That's believing the gospel.

There's another king. There's another Lord. It's Jesus.

When I confess him as my Lord, and I take that seriously, I am translated. I'm born again. Jesus told Nicodemus, unless you're born again, you can't enter the kingdom of God.

Unless a man is born of water and of the spirit, he cannot see the kingdom of God. The kingdom of God is a kingdom with spiritual invisible borders. The globe is Christ's domain.

All authority in heaven and earth has been given to him. And who's in the kingdom? We don't wear uniforms. It's not obvious when you walk down the street, you see someone that that person's in the kingdom.

Certainly you can't go to a certain geographical area and say, well, this is where the kingdom of God is. These people are in the kingdom. No, it's a kingdom whose membership, whose citizenry is defined by invisible realities, spiritual rebirth.

But it's not invisible when you're around these people long enough to see who is their king. It should always be the case that when unbelievers get to know you, even if you've never told them you're a Christian, they'll say, why do you live that way? When I was a teenager, one of the first jobs I had was working in an office with some other teenagers selling stuff. I wasn't there long because I'm not a salesman.

But I think it was our first coffee break. The first day I was there, the first coffee break, one of the girls came up and said, you're a Christian, aren't you? I was like 16, 17 years old. I said, yeah, but how in the world did you know that? She said, because you're the only one here who doesn't cuss.

I thought, well, it's interesting that people would notice someone who doesn't cuss. I notice when someone does. The people I'm around don't talk that way usually.

You ever watch a movie that someone sends a good movie and in the first five minutes, they use so many cuss words, you can hardly stand, you have to turn it off. That's normal for them. It's not normal for the society I live in, for followers of Christ.

But if they found out more than that, that I was living celibate and that I give my money to the spread of the gospel and to help the poor, which are not things they were doing, they'd see that we have different ways of life. And that's what the kingdom of God was seen to be in the early church. On the first day of the church, Peter preached, 3000 people got saved.

What do we read about them? Well, they continued daily under the apostles teaching and prayers and breaking bread and fellowship, and they shared their goods with each other. And they had great favor with all the people. Why? Because their lives were changed, not just individually, their community life.

They had a communal expression, an alternative society of people who served the king, Jesus, and their lives were different. Then when the apostles preached the gospel that Jesus is Lord, people had a clear idea in their head of what that meant, because they could see there's a community of people over here who live really differently than the rest of us. And I think it's a good thing.

These people don't get divorced. These people aren't getting drunk on weekends or any other time. These people are not cursing.

These people are not stealing. They're giving their money to each other when they have needs. They're not cheating on their spouses.

This is a different society here. And the kingdom of God is such a society. Now, obviously, we can't say that about the institutional churches.

The kingdom of God is not the same as the institutional Christianity, because people in institutional churches do all those things as a way of life. There are fornicators in every large church you'll ever visit. There are certainly drunkards.

There are people smoking weed and things like that. Not in the church service, but they do that in their lives. And they don't live for Christ.

And that's how you know that when you go to such a church, you're not looking at the kingdom of God. The kingdom of God is made up of people who really are born again and really have made that decision, I'm going to follow Jesus. I'm going to die for Jesus if necessary.

He's my king. I'd die for my king. It's amazing how many Christians would die for their country in the military, but they would be loath to die for Jesus.

You can see where their loyalty is. Christians should die for anyone that needs to be died for. This greater love has no one than this, and he lays down his life.

But certainly, to die for Jesus would be counted the greatest patriotism, the greatest privilege. Of anyone who's a follower of Christ. And the gospel is that kingdom.

Now, some might say, but I thought Paul said the gospel is Jesus died for our sins and rose again the third day. Yes, that too. That's part of it.

Paul said that in 1 Corinthians 15, 3, and he did say that's the gospel he preached then, but it's only a part of it. We know that when Paul said, I preached the gospel and this is what I preached, he's not giving the whole thing. He was with them for 18 months preaching and teaching.

He didn't just say Jesus died for your sins and rose from the dead. In fact, in the same book in chapter two, he says, I determined to know nothing among you except Christ and him crucified. Doesn't even mention the resurrection there.

I just preach Christ and him crucified. Well, certainly Paul preached more than that because 13 chapters later, he preached Christ crucified and raised from the dead and also clearly ascended. And what is the ascension of Jesus about? That is actually as important a part, if not the most important part of that message, that often isn't really presented because Christians often don't really know its significance.

The ascension of Christ is Christ ascending to the throne at the right hand of God. Christ is on the throne now. There is not a throne awaiting him because he's also, he's on the highest throne there is in the universe above all heaven and earth.

All authority is given to him. He's at the right hand of God. He is the ruler over those who submit to him and serve him and obey him.

That's what Peter said. He says that Jesus is the one who has given salvation to those who obey him. Now you don't get saved by obeying Christ, but you don't get saved without believing he's your king.

You're saved by faith, but you have to believe what the Bible says about Jesus, not your own made up Jesus. Paul said, you make sure you don't accept another Jesus or accept another gospel. He told the second, in second Corinthians 11, don't, I'm afraid you might do that.

Well, don't, don't accept another Jesus. The real Jesus is the king. He's the Lord.

He's nothing less. You receive that Christ, you believe in him, you're saved. But what happens to you when you believe he's your Lord and your king? Well, you live for him.

If you don't, then the suggestion that you believe he is your Lord sounds kind of hollow.

You know, Jesus said in the Sermon on the Mount, he says, not everyone who says to me, Lord, Lord will inherit, will enter the kingdom of heaven. But he said, but those who do the will of my father in heaven.

Yeah, you can talk about Jesus being Lord, but if you're not doing his will consciously and deliberately as your life course and determination, then he isn't your Lord. You can use the word, but words aren't what gets you to heaven. Paul said, the kingdom of God is not in word, but in power, letting God's power and his authority rule over your life.

That's living in the kingdom of God. That's having righteousness, peace, enjoying the Holy Spirit. And that is the good news.

Yes, Jesus died for our sins and rose again so that he could be ascended on high. And he's purchased us with his blood. And now he can rule over us from the throne at the right hand of God.

Jesus said in Revelation 3:21, to him that overcomes I'll grant to sit with me upon my throne, even as I have overcome and I'm seated by my father on his throne. Jesus is now seated with his father on his throne. And then those who are loyal to him will be enthroned with him.

We will reign with him. Paul said in second Timothy 2, 12, he said, if we endure, we shall reign with him. That's that's the promise.

Certainly it's part of the good news, but the good news is in fact, Jesus himself. Jesus is the message, Jesus, Lordship, Jesus, kingship. That's the kingdom of God, having Jesus as your king.

And that is the good news for for mankind. And I have to say that not only do the heathen not know this, but I think a lot of people who regard themselves as Christians, unfortunately, have not really been told this. And that's a shame because it's not like it's not like it's hidden somewhere in the Bible.

It's right on the surface. The very first words Jesus spoke in Mark 1, 15 was the kingdom of God is at hand. Believe that.

Well, every Christian has heard the term kingdom of God, but I don't think I've met so many as four out of five. I don't think I've met one out of five who could define the kingdom of God the way the Bible does. And they usually just assume, well, it must be must be in heaven, because I mean, that's what the gospels are going to heaven, right? Well, that's part of it.

It's not about heaven, though. Jesus said, when you pray, say your kingdom come, your will be done on earth as it is in heaven. That prayer is supposed to be agreeable with our commission.

We desire and we are working toward God's kingdom expanding on earth, growing like a mustard seed into a great tree, as Jesus said it would, or like a little stone into a great mountain to fill the earth. And that the result would be God's kingdom, God's will being done on earth as it is in heaven. That's what we're praying for.

That's what we're living for. If you're not living for the same thing you're praying for, you might as well not be praying. And so that's what I understand the gospel to be.