

Bible Insights

The Gospel, the Kingdom, and Baptism

by Wayne Conrad

Today I want to discuss with you the Gospel, the Kingdom, and Baptism. The Great Commission to the apostles recorded for us in Matthew 28:16-20, comes in the context of the advancing of the Kingdom of God.

For you see, it's the theme of Jesus as the King of the Kingdom of God that is at the heart of the Gospel of Matthew. He writes specifically with Jewish people in mind, the Hebrew people, to inform them that Jesus, the Son of Mary, is the Son of David, and the Son of Abraham, who has come in fulfillment of the prophecies that God would send a Ruler to establish his rule in the earth. That rule is known as "the Kingdom of God," or as Matthew uses it, the "kingdom of heaven."

Now Matthew's Gospel is saturated with concepts concerning the Kingdom. It opens in Chapter 1 with the annunciation of the angel to Joseph, concerning the birth of Mary's son, Jesus. The Angel says to him, "Joseph, son of David, don't be afraid to take Mary as your wife because what has been conceived in her is from the Holy Spirit. She will give birth to a son, and you are to give him the name "Jesus" because he will save his people from their sins." Now all of this took place to fulfill what was spoken by the Lord through the prophet, as Isaiah says, "The virgin will become pregnant and give birth to a son and they will call him Immanuel which is translated "God with us."

For the next narrative in Matthew, chapter 2, is the coming of the wise men, which probably took place anywhere from a year to 18 months after the birth of Jesus. And they had come from a long distance and when they arrived they wanted to know where was he who was born king of the Jews and the rabbis informed them, at Herod the King's behest, that Bethlehem in the land of Judah will be the place where the ruler of Judah will come from, where the Messiah would be born, and you know then the story that happened. The wise men sought him out and worshipped him. Herod almost immediately, when they departed, sought out to find the child kill him, but Joseph had fled to Egypt with her son.

Now when the gospel proper begins to open up with the ministry of John the Baptizer, he appears on the scene with this message, "Repent, for the

Kingdom of heaven is at hand.” And he instituted a baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sins and so the people flocked to him at the River Jordan, and there they were immersed by him, repenting of their sins and looking for the arrival of God’s King and Kingdom.

Now one day Jesus came to John to be baptized by him but John at first said, “No, no, I can’t baptize you” because he knew that this was the One who was anointed by God and sent by him. He was the holy one of God, the Messiah, but Jesus said, “We must do so now because we must fulfill everything that God requires and since John’s baptism had been instituted directly by God, he consented and baptized Jesus. But when Jesus was baptized, he came up from the water and as he did so the voice of the Father spoke saying, “This is my beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased.” And the Holy Spirit descended upon him in plentitude of power; all power was granted unto him for his messianic work.

He then went into the desert to be tempted and then he returned to proclaim your message to the people. Matthew 4:23 records this, “and Jesus went throughout all Galilee, teaching in their synagogues and proclaiming the Gospel of the Kingdom, healing every disease and every affliction among the people.”

So the gospel, the good news, that Jesus came bringing to people, was that of the Kingdom and he himself is the King of that Kingdom. And when he’s teaching his disciples to pray in what we call the Lord’s Prayer, which is really the disciples’ prayer, Jesus has embedded in this petition that we are to pray, “Our Father in heaven, hallowed be your name, your Kingdom come, your will be done on earth as it is in heaven.”

So we are to pray for the coming of the Kingdom of God but the Kingdom of God is arrived in Jesus and yet the Kingdom of God is not here in all of its fullness, so how did the Acts of the Apostles treat this message about the Kingdom of God? How did they fulfill the Commission that Jesus gave them? And we’re going to come to that in a moment in a little greater detail, but consider this prayer, reported for us in Acts chapter 4, because this is a direct fulfillment of how the disciples themselves understood and prayed this petition of the Disciples’ Model Prayer. In Acts four they pray, “Sovereign Lord, who made the heavens and the earth and the sea and everything in them, who through the mouth of our father David, your servant, said by the Holy Spirit, “Why did the gentiles rage and the people

plot in vain? The kings of the earth set themselves, and the rulers were gathered together against the Lord and against his anointed.” His anointed is the King of the Kingdom, so they're praying about Jesus and what happened to him in the crucifixion. They go on in their prayer, “For truly in this city there were gathered together against your holy servant Jesus, whom you anointed, both Herod and Pontius Pilate, along with the gentiles and the peoples of Israel, to do whatever your hand and your plan had predestined to take place, and now, Lord, look upon their threats and grant your servants to continue to speak your word with all boldness.”

They understood that their Commission was to proclaim the gospel of the Kingdom. Now that this is true, let's look at Matthew chapter 24 and verse 14. Jesus is speaking about what the disciples will be doing from the time he leaves in the ascension until he returns and he especially focuses in his Olivet Discourse on what will happen in judgment on Israel around 70AD as he prophesized the destruction of Jerusalem.

But he tells them in this context, extending all the way to the end of the ages and this gospel of the Kingdom will be proclaimed throughout the whole world as a testimony to all nations, that is, all people groups and then the end will come. So Jesus is the King of the Kingdom and when he came to earth in his incarnation and in his ministry, the Kingdom of God was present in him and in his ministry and the nucleus of that Kingdom is right there with Jesus and his disciples. That's the beginning, you might say also, of the church – with Jesus gathered with the disciples around him, he constitutes them his people on earth.

Now the church is related to the King but it's not exactly the same thing but they are so closely related, for it is the church who proclaims the Kingdom, the good news of the Kingdom, and it is the church who receives those who are the recipients of the Kingdom by conversion through regeneration, conversion to Christ. They're transferred, the epistles tell us, from the kingdom of darkness into the Kingdom of light, that go out from the domain of Satan, the world, the flesh, and the devil into the domain of Jesus Christ, the Lord of glory, the king of God's Kingdom.

In other words, they become participants of the Kingdom, citizens of the Kingdom of God, so the Kingdom of God is here in sort of a mystery form. It is present in the lives of true believers, it is present in the ministry and

presence of the Holy Spirit in the lives of the disciples of the Lord Jesus Christ.

What gospel did the apostles proclaim in the Book of Acts? Well, they proclaimed the gospel of the Kingdom but what is that gospel of the Kingdom, what is the good news, the good news of Jesus the Messiah?

The good news is that he has come to establish God's Kingdom and he has done so by his death on behalf of sinners in which he therefore forgives rebels and he sends his Holy Spirit to convert them, to bring about regeneration so that they repent of their sins and place their faith in him as the Savior, the Lord, the King, and they then become his loyal disciples, and they pledged themselves to him in the waters of baptism.

The Book of Acts which begins and ends with the Kingdom of God, just like Matthew's gospel. The book starts with Jesus appearing to the disciples to instruct them about the Kingdom of God during the 40 days between his resurrection and his ascension. That's reported in Acts 1:3, and it ends with the apostle Paul in the heart of the capital city of the Roman Empire, proclaiming the Kingdom of God and teaching about the Lord Jesus Christ with all boldness and without hindrance. So if you want to know how you preach the gospel of the Kingdom to people today you read the sermon summaries that are in the Book of Acts, that is, the proclamation of the Kingdom of God.

It's a proclamation about Jesus, his person and his work, and how that takes care of man's sin against God and his rebellion against the rightful King, how his resurrection and the power of the Holy Spirit, based on his making all sufficient sacrifice for sin, brings about regeneration and thus conversion takes place, and the church grows and the Kingdom is extended.

Jesus presented himself alive to the disciples after his suffering by many proofs, appearing to them during the 40 days and speaking about the Kingdom of God. How did Philip do It? Listen to Acts 8:12. It says when they believed Philip as he preached good news about the Kingdom of God and the name of Jesus Christ; they were baptized both men and women" - what I'm telling you is that the kingship of Jesus is central to the gospel. Jesus is Lord, he is sovereign; he is Incarnate God. Now when you enter

into the Kingdom of God there is a ritual that the Lord Jesus Christ himself instituted.

It's the initiation ceremony of the Christian and we call it "baptism." Now baptism is presented in its many facets of meaning in the various gospel narratives, and in the epistles, and demonstrated for us in the acts of the apostles but I want us to simply consider baptism in the words of Matthew chapter 28 in which Jesus says that we are to preach the gospel and then when people believe they are to be baptized.

He says, "Therefore going, make disciples of all nations, of all peoples, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe everything I've commanded you, and remember, I'm with you always to the end of the age."

This is a mandate for us to be engaged in the proclamation of the message about the King of the Kingdom of God. We are to proclaim the king and his great work by which he reconciles sinners to God and brings them into his glorious Kingdom. To mark the arrival of such disciples, to mark their initiation into a life of discipleship, into a walk of discipleship, they are baptized in the name of the triune God, Father, Son and Holy Spirit. and thus they come under the authority of the living God, as believers in the Lord Jesus Christ.

This is part of the meaning about baptism; it's not the exhaustive meaning but I want us to think of it in terms of being the initiation of disciples as soldiers in God's Kingdom army. We go forth with a message of truth. We do not fight the battles by the weapons of men or carnal weapons of the flesh; we fight with the proclamation of the truth about Jesus Christ, the rightful King and we proclaim that men who are rebels against the almighty God must lay down their weapons of surrender and give themselves in loving devotion to Him who has redeemed them by his cross.

This is the message of the Gospel of the Kingdom and baptism is a sign that we have entered the Kingdom of God, that we are soldiers in the army of the Lord. this has been Wayne Conrad with Bible insights and until the next time, remember our Commission: **going, disciple, baptize, and teach.**

August 21, 2022

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