

Pearl of Great Price

3-20-11

Christians are sometimes surprised at how much of Jesus' teaching is devoted to explaining the "Gospel of the Kingdom", which carries a somewhat different, but not contradictory, emphasis from the "Gospel of Grace and Reconciliation" through the cross of Jesus Christ outlined in the Apostle Paul's letters.

Since the Reformation, we have trusted Paul's *Ephesians 2:8-9* to explain the heart of our faith: "For by grace you have been saved through faith and that not of yourselves; it is the gift of God...." Also, *2 Corinthians 5:18-21*: "Now all things are of God, who has reconciled us to Himself through Jesus Christ, and has given us the ministry of reconciliation." These Pauline themes emphasize the importance of personal salvation and having a personal relationship with God. The great evangelistic ministries of the past four hundred years all preached this message fruitfully, often with the fiery anointing of the Holy Spirit confirming its truth in great power.

In recent years Messianic Judaism has awakened us to another perspective about Jesus' mission. Yes, spiritually speaking, the kingdom of God is within us, as Jesus taught in *Luke 17:20-21*. "And Jesus went about all Galilee, teaching in their synagogues, and preaching the gospel of the kingdom, and healing all manner of sickness and all manner of disease among the people." (*Matt 4:23*, see also *Luke 4:43* and *Matt 24:14*.) The healings were a sign that the kingdom of God had impacted individuals inwardly, physically and powerfully. (*Luke 10:9*)

Yet, corporately speaking, we also understand that Jesus will return a second time to rule as the sovereign "King of kings" from Mt. Zion. In that day every knee shall bow and every tongue confess that He is Lord, and all nations will serve Him (*Psalms 72:11, Romans 14:11, Phil 2:10*). Worldwide fulfillment of the rulership of King Jesus Messiah will one day arrive on earth, coming at an hour no one expects. (*Matt 24:44*)

How did Jesus describe the Kingdom of God? Here are a few brief descriptions from His parables, which often carry both an inner, spiritual connotation and an outer, worldly connotation:

- **The Kingdom is very valuable, something to be sought, a thing of great and rare beauty** – like a "pearl of great price" which a merchant sold everything to buy (*Matt 13:45-46*).
- **The Kingdom is hidden, but can be found, and when found, is priceless** – like treasure buried in a field that a man sold everything to buy. (*Matt 13:44*) This parable says the man did it "for joy!"
- **The goodness of the Kingdom is intermingled with the harsh realities of life** – like a field of good wheat where an enemy sowed bad seed during the night. (*Matt 13:24-30*) Only when the final harvest comes will the bad crop be separated and burned, said Jesus.
- **The Kingdom has the capacity to give huge increase** – like the tiny mustard seed which becomes a great tree that gives rest to the birds of the air. (*Matt 13:31-32*) Today, more than 2 billion people worldwide say they are Christians, yet Jesus began with only twelve disciples!
- **The Kingdom has the power to change things dynamically and dramatically** – like a little bit of leaven added to flour and water to make loaves of nourishing bread. (*Matt 13:31-32*) Jesus said, He, Himself, is the bread that comes down from heaven to give eternal life! (*John 6:51*)
- **The Kingdom of God manifested brings division and judgment** – like a net dragged in the sea that brings forth all kinds of fish that have to be sorted into the good and bad. (*Matt 13:47-51*) So it will be at the End of the Age, when the wicked will be cast into the "furnace of fire."
- **If the riches of this world captivate you, it will be hard to enter the kingdom of heaven** – as hard as to ride a camel through the eye of a needle. (*Matt 19:23-25*) Jesus calls upon us to make His teachings the radical priority of our lives. "Seek ye first the kingdom of God and His righteousness, and everything else will be given to you!" (*Matt 6:33*)

We experience the Gospel of the Kingdom today foremost as the love of God made real to us in the person and spiritual power of Jesus Christ, just like those who first heard Him teach and witnessed His miracles 2000 years ago. "He who has seen Me has seen the Father," said Jesus. (*John 14:8*) *Do people see God's Kingdom in you?*