

## Our Lord's Message

Powerful, radical, confrontational, life changing, and freeing are all words which describe the teachings of our Lord Jesus Christ. A careful comparison of his communications alongside that which is commonly taught today in his name reveals a shocking surprise. The essence of his message has been obscured (if not completely lost); the substance of which can be summarized under the heading: the Kingdom of God. From his first teaching, called the Sermon on the Mount, until the day he ascended into heaven, he consistently maintained the same theme in his preaching and teaching, that which he called the Gospel of the Kingdom. Two short sentences in the Lord's prayer summarize the whole of the Kingdom of God. "Thy kingdom come. Thy will be done in earth, as it is in heaven" (Matthew 6:10). Today, man's will, not God's, is being done on earth.

For the many times that Jesus spoke about the Kingdom of God, he never once defined it. Equally surprising is that none of those who heard him ever asked for an explanation. Jesus spoke as if everyone already understood the Kingdom, and indeed they did. The knowledge regarding it was common to every Israelite for it was the hope for which they desperately waited, and had done so for centuries. To us, on the contrary, it is a strange term and an unknown concept. Since it is fundamental for understanding the message of our Lord, we must gain clarity. A good starting point is acknowledging man's need for God's Kingdom. Many scriptures declare the depravity of humanity, but none so descriptively and concisely as those in the epistle of Romans.

**Romans 3:10-18** There is none righteous, not even one; There is none who understands, there is none who seeks for God; All have turned aside, together they have become useless; There is none who does good, there is not even one. Their throat is an open grave, with their tongues they keep deceiving, The poison of asps is under their lips; Whose mouth is full of cursing and bitterness; Their feet are swift to shed blood, destruction and misery are in their paths, and the path of peace they have not known. There is no fear of God before their eyes.

This representation of mankind is not consistent with the way in which he was originally created. In the beginning he was in the image or likeness of God.

**Genesis 1:26-28** Then God said, "Let Us make man in Our image, according to Our likeness; and let them rule over the fish of the sea and over the birds of the sky and over the cattle and over all the earth, and over every creeping thing that creeps on the earth." God created man in His own image, in the image of God He created him; male and female He created them. God blessed them; and God said to them, "Be fruitful and multiply, and fill the earth, and subdue it; and rule over the fish of the sea and over the birds of the sky and over every living thing that moves on the earth."

God's original plan was for man to have dominion over a perfect world. He created Adam and Eve in His image, enabling them to have sovereignty upon the earth under His supreme and absolute authority. In this original perfect environment and in his original perfect state, mankind would have had a loving harmonious life with God and each other forever. Sin, hate, contentions, sorrow, sickness, and death were nonexistent in the Garden of Eden. Godliness, love, peace, joy, health, and life flourished and would have forever.

However, after being enticed by the serpent, Adam and Eve made the decision to disobey God's direct command. The consequences of their choice were cataclysmic, affecting every aspect of creation. Their dominion was greatly diminished, the earth was corrupted, and their harmonious relationships were tarnished with enmity and contention. Sin enveloped mankind as Satan became the god of this age and, as such, the primary influencing agent upon humanity. Their immortality was replaced with death.

The fall of man indeed destroyed God's original plan, but by no means deterred God from His purpose. Immediately after the fall, God set in motion the plan to redeem man and restore the earth to its paradise state. As the Scriptures progress, this plan becomes its main theme which is called by our Lord, Jesus Christ, THE KINGDOM OF GOD.

As the book of Genesis explains what happened in the beginning, the book of Revelation foretells what will happen in the end. God's Kingdom will come, and His will shall be done on earth just as it is in heaven. Adam and Eve were cast out of paradise and restrained from eating from the tree of life. Their paradise was completely destroyed with the flood in the time of Noah. However, God promises that paradise and the tree of life will come again.

**Revelation 2:7** He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches. To him who overcomes, I will grant to eat of the tree of life which is in the Paradise of God.

The righteous will regain dominion over God's recreated earth. Man's relationship with God will be like it was before the fall: holy, loving, harmonious, and completely unfettered by sin. The righteous will live forever with the Lord Jesus Christ and God on the paradise-like earth.

**Revelation 21:1-4** Then I saw a new heaven and a new earth; for the first heaven and the first earth passed away, and there is no longer any sea. And I saw the holy city, new Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, made ready as a bride adorned for her husband. And I heard a loud voice from the throne, saying, "Behold, the tabernacle of God is among men, and He will dwell among them, and they shall be His people, and God Himself will be among them, and He will wipe away every tear from their eyes; and there will no longer be any death; there will no longer be any mourning, or crying, or pain; the first things have passed away."

The beginning understanding of the Kingdom of God is found with the patriarch Abraham. God made a covenant with Him that has impact upon all those who have faith. God made many promises to this man, some of which have been fulfilled, others which will be when the Kingdom comes. God initiated the relationship with Abram (later He changed his name to Abraham) while he lived in Mesopotamia. His instructions were specific — leave your country, relatives, father's house and go to the land I will show you. God promised the following:

**Genesis 12:2-3** And I will make you a great nation, And I will bless you, And make your name great; And so you shall be a blessing; And I will bless those who bless you, And the one who curses you I will curse. And in you all the families of the earth will be blessed.

Abram obeyed God and departed, hence began their relationship which later was characterized by God when He said, "Abraham my friend." No one else is called the friend of God! As Abraham grew in his faith and commitment, so did God's commitment and promises. God extended Himself to Abraham in an extraordinary way. He made promises to him and his seed which extended into the everlasting. To seal the promises, God made a covenant of blood with him which absolutely ensured that His promises would be fulfilled. After Abraham demonstrated his faith by obeying God to the degree of offering the life of his son Isaac, God committed Himself in a remarkably unique way. He swore to Himself that He would keep the promises made to Abraham. At no other time does God give the threefold guarantee of: promise, covenant, and swearing. A thorough investigation of Genesis 12 through 22 will provide a comprehensive view of all the promises made. We have already noted that God first promised to make a great nation of him. As the Scriptures progressively develop, what becomes apparent is that Israel is this promised nation. However, what was not so obvious for many years is that God also promises that nations would come from Abram. As a matter of fact, the name change from Abram to Abraham reflects this additional promise. "Abraham" means father of many nations.

**Genesis 17:5** No longer shall your name be called Abram, But your name shall be Abraham; For I will make you the father of a multitude of nations.

The Hebrew word "goy" is translated into English as either "nation" or "Gentiles." Even today Jewish people use the word "goy" to refer to anyone who is not of Israel. God revealed to the Apostle Paul that which was a mystery for centuries — that God had always intended to include the Gentiles as heirs of the promises made to Abraham. (Israel always considered Abraham to be their Father.) However Paul revealed that the true children of Abraham are those of faith from both Israel (the circumcision) and the Gentiles (uncircumcision). Those who have the same faith as Abraham are considered to be his children.

**Romans 4:11-12, 16** and he received the sign of circumcision, a seal of the righteousness of the faith which he had while uncircumcised, so that he might be the father of all who believe without being circumcised, that righteousness might be credited to them, and the father of circumcision to those who not only are of the circumcision, but who also follow in the steps of the faith of our father Abraham which he had while uncircumcised...For this reason it is by faith, in order that it may be in accordance with grace, so that the promise will be guaranteed to all the descendants, not only to those who are of the Law, but also to those who are of the faith of Abraham, who is the father of us all,

Abraham is the father to all those who believe. God compared his seed to the dust of the earth, the innumerable stars, and the sand upon the seashores because He knew it would encompass a lot more than just the biological descendants of Israel. Israel is only one nation. The inclusion of the Gentiles made his seed to be many nations.

**Galations 3:6-9** Even so Abraham believed God, and it was reckoned to him as righteousness. Therefore, be sure that it is those who are of faith who are sons of Abraham. The Scripture, foreseeing that God would justify the Gentiles by faith, preached the gospel beforehand to Abraham, saying, "all the nations will be blessed in you." So then those who are of faith are blessed with Abraham, the believer.

When God spoke prophetically to Abraham, his seed included all those who would believe from both Israel and the Gentiles because of the accomplished work of Jesus Christ.

**Verse 14** in order that in Christ Jesus the blessing of Abraham might come to the Gentiles, so that we would receive the promise of the Spirit through faith.

If we believe in Christ, then we are the seed of Abraham and heirs together of the same promises.

**Verse 29** And if you belong to Christ, then you are Abraham's descendants, heirs according to promise

The faithful followers of Christ will inherit the same promises which were made to Abraham. One very important promise was regarding the land. When God first mentioned land to Abram, no specific boundaries were provided. He simply stated "this land" (Genesis 12:7). However, as time went on, the land mass expanded greatly. In the end God promised Abraham and his seed (which we now know included all those of faith) the whole world.

**Romans 4:13** For the promise to Abraham or to his descendants that he would be heir of the world was not through the Law, but through the righteousness of faith.

That which Adam and Eve lost and which the book of Revelation declares will come again, a total regenerated earth, was promised to Abraham and his children of faith. Israel occupied part of the land promised and did so for a relatively short period of time. However that occupation was by no means the complete fulfillment of the promises made to Abraham. It did not encompass the whole world, nor did it last forever. At best it was a prototype for that which will happen when Christ returns and sets up the Kingdom of God.

Although most believe that everlasting life will be spent in heaven, the Scriptures clearly and frequently declare that Paradise on earth is the destiny of the faithful. A careful study of Jesus' teachings reveals that he taught the Kingdom of God will be on earth.

Another significant promise made to Abraham that relates to the Kingdom of God is that "kings shall come out of thee." Indeed many kings were descendants of Abraham, the most notable being David and Jesus. David's reign over Israel is set forth as the prototype for Jesus' reign over Israel and the world for the first 1,000 years after his return. David's first act as king over a united Israel was to take the city of Jerusalem and to make it the center of worship and the capital city. Moses told Israel that God had selected a special location in the promised land for His own — a place where He would be worshipped.

However when Joshua led Israel into the land, they took all the area around Jerusalem but never took the city itself. The specific place that God wanted, which would be called the city of God, was left to be occupied by pagans. For over 500 years, they did not take Jerusalem. David, a man after God's own heart took the city and proceeded to carry out God's will for His city. The very next thing that David did was to bring the ark of the covenant into the city and establish the praise and worship that God wanted and that Israel had neglected. David appointed thousands of Levites to praise and serve the Lord. This time was called "the time of Zion" and is viewed as the sweetest relationship Israel had with God. Unfortunately it was short-lived, but it still stands as a prototype for what Jesus will do when he returns. In that day, Jesus will again take Jerusalem for God and make it His capital city for the worldwide theocracy. It will again be the city of God.

God made a covenant with David just as He had done years before with Abraham.

**I Chronicles 17:11-14** When your days are fulfilled that you must go to be with your fathers, that I will set up one of your descendants after you, who will be of your sons; and I will establish his kingdom. "He shall build for Me a house, and I will establish his throne forever. "I will be his father and he shall be My son; and I will not take My lovingkindness away from him, as I took it from him who was before you. "But I will settle him in My house and in My kingdom forever, and his throne shall be established forever."

The seed of David to sit upon his throne forever is Jesus of Nazareth, called the Christ. When the angel told Mary about her unborn child, he declared that her child would be the one promised to David.

**Luke 1:31-33** And behold, you will conceive in your womb and bear a son, and you shall name Him Jesus. "He will be great and will be called the Son of the Most High; and the Lord God will give Him the throne of His father David; and He will reign over the house of Jacob forever, and His kingdom will have no end."

Jesus will reign on the throne of David in Jerusalem (II Samuel 7:12-14; Psalms 132:11; Isaiah 9:6 and 7; 16:5; Jeremiah 23:5 and 6).

The Old Testament is filled with prophecies regarding the Christ. The word "Messiah" is primarily used in the Old Testament, while the word "Christ" is primarily used in the New Testament. Both words mean the same thing — the anointed one. The high priest, the prophet, and the king were all anointed and, as such, served as prototypes for the Christ. Moses (the first five books of the Old Testament) and all the prophets (the remainder of the Old Testament) spoke often regarding the Messiah. They communicated many details about that which he would do and say. Before the Messiah was born, these Scriptures provided an intricate, complex blueprint so that there would be a standard to compare and determine the authenticity of the Christ. Although the four Gospels do not chronicle everything Jesus did and said, they do declare everything necessary to determine that he is the Christ. He fulfilled all that was prophesied regarding his first coming.

In that he fulfilled these prophecies proving that he is the Christ, we can have absolute confidence that he also will return and complete the rest of that which is promised regarding him. Again, much is written about his second coming. His return will mark the beginning of God's Kingdom on earth. He will ensure that God's will is done on earth as it is in heaven.

Before Jesus was resurrected and ascended into heaven, he endured the most horrific torture and death ever known to man. His suffering and death provided the substitutionary sacrifice necessary for man's redemption and salvation. Before Jesus returns again there will be a time of great suffering and death. However, he will not be the victim this time. The 3½ years before his return will be a time of great tribulation upon the whole of humanity. The earth and everyone in it will be affected.

The Christian's great hope is centered in Christ's return when the resurrection of the just will occur. In this first raising of the dead, all the believers from the past ages will be resurrected and given a new life that will be everlasting. The believers who are alive when he comes will be transformed simultaneously with the resurrected ones. When Jesus was resurrected he became the firstborn from the dead. Firstborn implies that none came before but that others will follow. The life he was given

when he was raised from the dead is an example of what will be given to those in the resurrection of the just.

At this time, Jesus will begin to rule God's Kingdom on earth. He will sit on the throne of David in God's city, Jerusalem. He will rule the world on God's behalf, and all the nations will be brought into his subjection. The resurrected saints will reign with him as kings and priests and do so for 1,000 years. During this millennium, Satan will be chained in the bottomless pit, and his influence upon the world will be withheld (Revelation 20:1-6).

This time is called the regeneration because there will be a recreation of life (Matthew 19:28; Titus 3:5). The changes are going to be radical, progressive, and encompassing of everyone and everything. The undesirable and unproductive geographic features of the earth will be changed. Valleys will be exalted; mountains will be brought low (Isaiah 40:4). Deserts and wilderness will flourish with water and vegetation (Isaiah 35:7; 41:18 and 19; 43:19).

All war and the thoughts of war will cease (Isaiah 2:4; Micah 4:3). The weapons of war will be burned with fire for the first seven years after Christ returns and molded into tools of agriculture (Ezekiel 39:9). Even the animal kingdom will undergo a drastic change. Animals will be vegetarians and peacefully coexist with each other and mankind (Isaiah 11:6-9; 65:25). All these changes will evolve until, in the end, paradise will be established on earth.

At the end of the 1,000 years, Satan will be loosed for a short time. He will once again deceive many and endeavor to lead an insurrection against Christ's Kingdom. However his efforts will be short lived because all those involved will be devoured by fire which comes down out of heaven from God. Then the devil will be cast into the lake of fire and brimstone where he will be totally annihilated forever (Revelation 20:7-10).

At the same time, the second resurrection — the resurrection of the unjust — will happen. In this resurrection, all unbelievers from the past ages and those in the millennium kingdom will be judged. Whoever is not written in the book of life will be cast into the lake of fire along with death and the grave (Revelation 20:11-15).

After all of this, Jesus the Christ will deliver the Kingdom to his Father. Then God will rule over all and dwell among His people. Mankind will live with Christ and God in a new heaven and new earth. Again paradise will be established, and man will have access to the tree of life (I Corinthians 15:24-28; Revelation 21 and 22).

The many things that Jesus did which are recorded in the four Gospels proved that he was the Christ, the Son of God. Also contained in the Gospels, and equally as important, are the many things he said.

As John the Baptist's ministry came to an end because of his imprisonment, our Lord's ministry began to flourish. The following statement spoken at the commencement of his ministry declares the recurring theme of his message.

**Matthew 4:17** From that time Jesus began to preach and say, "Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand."

He faithfully communicated the gospel of the Kingdom throughout his ministry until he ascended into heaven.

**Matthew 4:23** Jesus was going throughout all Galilee, teaching in their synagogues and proclaiming the gospel of the kingdom...

**Acts 1:3** To these He also presented Himself alive after His suffering, by many convincing proofs, appearing to them over *a period of forty days* and speaking of the things concerning the kingdom of God.

However with all that he taught about the Kingdom, little emphasis was placed on the details set forth in this writing. Unlike today, everyone knew about the coming Kingdom; therefore he did not need to explain. So common was this knowledge that even men like Herod knew. Herod, the evil, unbelieving governor, understood that the Messiah was coming to reign on the throne of David and rule Israel. He was so convinced and threatened by the Messiah that he slaughtered all the children two years old and under in Bethlehem in an endeavor to eliminate him.

From the days of Abraham, for thousands of years, the Israelites looked for the fulfillment of the promise which would bring God's Kingdom to earth. Moses and all the prophets wrote concerning the Kingdom, so indeed it was commonly understood. Likewise the New Testament writers, the apostles, all spoke the same. The book of Acts ends with this summary statement regarding Paul the Apostle's ministry:

**Acts 28:31** preaching the kingdom of God and teaching concerning the Lord Jesus Christ with all openness, unhindered.

Paul taught the Kingdom of God with the added insight concerning our Lord Jesus in his exalted position as Christ. After he ascended into heaven, another phase of the Kingdom plan began. The time period between his ascension and his return (which is the age we live in) is called the age of grace. Today things are very different from when Jesus walked the earth or from how it will be when he returns as the King of earth. In the Old Testament, three great anointings are set forth as prototypes for Jesus the Christ (Anointed One) — the high priest, the prophet, and the king. These anointings help us to understand the relationship believers today have with Christ as we await his return.

The high priest of old served as the mediator and intercessor for the people of Israel. He offered animal sacrifices as an atonement for sins so that forgiveness could be received. The priest served in the tabernacle and, later in Solomon's time, in the temple. Jesus was anointed to be our high priest. He offered the perfect sacrifice once and for all providing eternal reconciliation and the forgiveness of sins. Today he is at God's right hand in the heavenlies, ever living to make intercession for us. He is declared to be a merciful, faithful, compassionate, high priest who runs to aid those who are tempted (Hebrews 2:10-18; 4:14-16).

Jesus was anointed to be the great prophet which Moses said would be like him yet greater (because his words would bring salvation to those who believe). Today, the prophet Jesus speaks to us through the Word of God recorded in the Scriptures and through the holy spirit that lives within us. In the same manner in which he taught and guided his disciples, he now works in us through the spirit. Because of the spirit, Christ lives in us; therefore our prophet is ever with us (Acts 3:19-26; John 14:25 and 26; 16:13 and 14).

Jesus the anointed one will reign on the throne of David when he returns. Today, he reigns within the hearts and lives of those who obey his commands. He is our Lord and Master; therefore he governs our lives as we await his glorious return. With Christ in us, we can do all things regardless of circumstances because he provides strength. He has made us to be more than conquerors even now as we dwell in this evil age (Luke 1:30-33; Romans 8:35-39).

When we hear our Lord's message, the logical question should be, "What must I do to be a part of the Kingdom of God?" The answer is also provided in the teaching of our Lord; therefore searching the Scriptures should be of paramount concern. Peter summed it up well.

**Acts 3:19-21** Therefore repent and return, so that your sins may be wiped away, in order that times of refreshing may come from the presence of the Lord; and that He may send Jesus, the Christ appointed for you, whom heaven must receive until *the* period of restoration of all things about which God spoke by the mouth of His holy prophets from ancient time.