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The Simplicity of the Christian Message

by Anthony Buzzard

The point and purpose of Christianity has been buried under a mass of theological tradition. There is general agreement only about the ethical demands of the present Christian life: a Christian must love and serve his neighbor. But almost nothing at all is known of the ultimate purpose and goal which Jesus of Nazareth, the Messiah, intended for those who follow him. Contemporary religion, which claims the name of Christ, has abandoned the purpose of the faith which is clearly spelled out by Jesus in his Gospel message -- the Gospel about the Kingdom of God (Luke 4:43, etc.).

In the purpose of the faith proclaimed by Jesus lies the very reason for our existence as individuals. The key to our personal future and that of humanity at large is found in Jesus' **Gospel Message about the Kingdom of God**. This is simply the Message of the Good News that God, in the person of His Son and Agent, Christ, the promised Messiah, intends to establish *just government and universal peace on earth* and to grant immortality to those who love Him. The future of the earth, and of the whole universe, is related to the future of the individual believer in this way: The Kingdom which will be established *on earth when Jesus returns to the earth* will be administered by those to whom God grants immortality.

The scheme implied by the **Good News of the Kingdom** is the very opposite of complex. The mind of a child is required to grasp it. Jesus said: "Unless you reorient your life and become like little children, you will certainly not enter the Kingdom of God."

To understand the Christian message, words must be taken as any child would take them -- in their natural and normal sense. The Kingdom of God, about which Jesus spoke constantly, is thus a real Kingdom, a divine government on earth, to be administered by Christ and the saints, with a renewed Jerusalem as its capital. Luke 19:11 should be taken as a key to the whole New Testament: "**Because Jesus was near to Jerusalem, they thought that the Kingdom of God was going to appear immediately.**" This verse gives us the clue to the meaning of the principal theme of all that Jesus taught. He was expecting to establish the Kingdom as a worldwide rule on earth.

Much of what goes by the name of theology is no more than an exercise in the evasion of the plain meaning of words, an excuse for unbelief. The churches have abandoned hope in the Kingdom which Jesus promised would be inaugurated at his return. It is obvious that the Kingdom has not yet been established. It will be manifested on earth at the (second) Coming of the Messiah in glory. For this Christians are to pray: "Thy Kingdom *come!*"

In answer to the very reasonable question as to what his followers might expect to receive in the Coming Age of the Kingdom, Jesus promised the disciples positions of rulership with him in the coming Kingdom (Matt. 19:28; Luke 22:28). This promise was extended to the whole church (1 Cor. 6:2; 2 Tim. 2:12; Rev. 5:10; 3:21; 2:26; 20:1-4). It was the natural confirmation and clarification of the promise made to Abraham, the father of the faithful, that he would one day possess the world (Rom. 4:13).

The Kingdom will have Jerusalem as its capital, as foreseen by all the Old Testament prophets, and it will be established by a spectacular divine intervention (Ps. 2), when the process of universal disarmament (Isa. 2) leading to total world peace will begin. The vision of the world at peace under the government of the Messiah is read annually at Christmas, but few believe it. They have been persuaded that the promises of universal divine government do not mean what they say. (See, for example, Isaiah 9:6-7; 11:1-9; Zechariah 14:9; Micah 4:7.)

The reason for this is twofold. People have been taught from childhood that the reward of Christianity offered in the Bible is to depart to a realm "beyond the skies" as a disembodied soul/spirit. Such a notion is completely without foundation in the Scriptures and must be banished from the thinking process before any progress in understanding the New Testament can be made. The dead according to the Bible are at present all dead, not alive in another place! They are waiting to be resurrected *from the dead*! They will then inherit the earth, i.e. the Kingdom of God on earth (Matt. 5:5; Rev. 5:10).

Secondly, it has not been realized that the "everlasting life" promised by the New Testament properly means "the Life of the Coming Age." This is a well-known expression used by Jesus and his contemporaries; the restoration of this definition of the goal of Christianity allows us to understand that the object of the Christian life is not to disappear at the moment of death to another world: It is to participate through a future resurrection from the dead in the *Future Age*, the Age of the establishment on earth of the Kingdom of God. It is everywhere taught in Scripture that the faithful dead are now "sleeping," unconscious in the grave, awaiting the resurrection to occur at the Coming of Jesus (Dan. 12:2; John 5:28, 29). All the faithful will then share with Christ in the promised Kingdom.

In the light of this simple scheme, the New Testament can be read with complete understanding, for the facts noted here represent the presupposition held by the New Testament writers. The challenge to the reader is one of belief. Jesus' first recorded utterance in Mark's Gospel is a command to repent (i.e. reorient one's mind and life) and *believe* the Good News about the Kingdom! (Mark 1:15) It was when potential converts believed **the Good News (Gospel) Message about the Kingdom of God** and the name of Jesus Christ that they were baptized into the faith (Acts 8:12). This is the process by which we are to be initiated into the faith.

The Gospel of the Kingdom thus confronts each of us as individuals at the moment he receives the proclamation of it by Jesus or the New Testament Evangelists. Thereafter, his response to the Divine Message is all-important for salvation:

A warning about the danger of ignoring the invitation to the Kingdom of God was given by Jesus: **"When anyone hears the message about the Kingdom (Matt. 13:19) and does not understand it, the devil comes and snatches away the Message which was sown in his heart so that he may not *believe and be saved*" (Luke 8:12).**
