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Jesus' Gospel of the Kingdom

One of the most remarkable phenomena in the history of human thought is the way in which the obvious can be hidden from both scholar and layman. The history of Christian thought demonstrates a signal example. Jesus Himself constantly taught that His Gospel Message would be hidden from the masses, whose minds were blinded by the counter-interests which would preoccupy them and prevent complete devotion to Him (Matt. 13:11-17).

The distinguished German exegete E. Haenchen (*Acts of the Apostles*, Hermeneia, 1971, p. 141) stated in regard to the preaching of the early apostolic church: "The preaching of the Kingdom of God *obviously* refers to the Kingdom of God which will begin with the Parousia [Second Coming of Jesus]." Elsewhere in the same commentary he remarks that "Kingdom of God itself describes the entire Christian proclamation" (on Acts 28:23).

While the Gospel of the Kingdom is the central concept in the preaching of Jesus and the apostles, and Kingdom of God refers to the apocalyptic Kingdom to be inaugurated at the Second Coming, the general public have been fed a very different idea. For liberals the Kingdom of God is a social program or a spiritual fellowship enjoyed now by the believer. For the fundamentalist the Kingdom is either an improved American society or bliss in heaven at the moment of death. None of these definitions of the Kingdom can possibly be squared with the evidence of the New Testament. The faith as Jesus preached it is therefore misrepresented at its very heart. The Gospel as Jesus taught it has been stifled.

Such injustice to the historical records of the Christian faith calls for an urgent public investigation. It is a documentable fact that leading contemporary spokesmen for the Christian faith confess that they do not preach the Gospel about the Kingdom (See Anthony Buzzard, *Our Fathers Who Aren't in Heaven*, pp. 29-34), though they recognize that Jesus always did. This astonishing discrepancy between what passes for the teaching of Jesus and what Jesus actually taught deserves the widest exposure. Restoration Fellowship hopes to make a small contribution to the righting of a historical and spiritual injustice to the man claimed by many to be the Messiah and Savior. To others at present unsympathetic to the claims of Jesus, the discovery that His Message has been significantly misrepresented since the second century will be a matter of intriguing interest.

Thanks to the labors of church historians we can be certain that Jesus not only proclaimed the Kingdom as the *raison d'être* of His mission (Luke 4:43), but that by Kingdom He meant what any who belonged to His Jewish heritage meant, namely "the world-empire of God - the divine reign in place of every earthly monarchy. This will be perfectly realized, fully established - here upon earth" (F.C. Grant, *Ancient Judaism and New Testament Christianity*, pp. 114, 115). Such a vision of a divine world empire had been

indeed the vision of all the prophets of Israel. Their Message Jesus merely confirmed, amplified and made the subject of His urgent call to repentance in view of the Great Event coming.

It is a matter of simple honesty that Christians claiming to follow Christ embrace in faith the Message which He and the apostles after Him proclaimed. It is evidently *not* the case that contemporary evangelists relay the Gospel about the Kingdom. They have reduced the Message of salvation to belief in the forgiveness of sins and the resurrection of Jesus. But they omit the foundation of salvation which lies in repentance and acceptance in faith of the Gospel about the Kingdom of God (Mark 1:14, 15; Acts 8:12, 19:8; 20:25; 29:23, 31, etc., and under different terminology as "the Word," "the Gospel," "the Mystery," "the Truth," etc. in the remainder of the NT documents).

The cause of the extraordinary anomaly presented by the dissimilarity between what the NT presents as the faith and what is commonly understood is traceable, as many distinguished theologians and historians have documented, to the fatal mixing of Greek paganism with the early Hebrew faith, which began in the second century, after the death of the apostles and as foreseen by them (Acts 20:29-31; 2 Pet. 2:1-3). We have documented from numerous sources the fact that just such a hellenization of the pristine faith did overtake the original Gospel Message of the Kingdom (See *Our Fathers Who Aren't in Heaven*, pp. 259-267). That this is not known to millions of unsuspecting churchgoers points to the need for widespread exposure.

The results of this original departure from Truth are evident in the fragmentation of contemporary Christianity into multitudes of differing denominations. Nothing could be more salutary than the recognition of the unsatisfactory status quo and a return to the pure Gospel of Jesus in regard to the Kingdom of God.
