

The Book of Acts (#11); Conversion to Christ (2)

We are considering the implications of the day of Pentecost to our understanding of the presence and power of the Holy Spirit converting people by the gospel to become disciples of Jesus Christ, that is, true Christians. The events of this day that is recorded in Acts 2 resulted in the sudden and miraculous conversion of thousands of Jewish people from their unbelief and rejection of Jesus as their promised Messiah to their repentance from sin and confessing through baptism their faith and submission to Jesus the Lord of the inaugurated kingdom of God.

Last Lord's Day we gave attention to the role of the Holy Spirit enabling the gospel to be proclaimed before the gathered crowds on Pentecost. The result was a great work of grace in which thousands of souls were converted by God's grace unto salvation. Let us read again of the work of God's grace in Acts 2:37 through 47:

Now when they heard this, they were cut to the heart, and said to Peter and the rest of the apostles, "Men and brethren, what shall we do?"

³⁸Then Peter said to them, "Repent, and let every one of you be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of sins; and you shall receive the gift of the Holy Spirit. ³⁹For the promise is to you and to your children, and to all who are afar off, as many as the Lord our God will call."

⁴⁰And with many other words he testified and exhorted them, saying, "Be saved from this perverse generation." ⁴¹Then those who gladly received his word were baptized; and that day about three thousand souls were added to them. ⁴²And they continued steadfastly in the apostles' doctrine and fellowship, in the breaking of bread, and in prayers. ⁴³Then fear came upon every soul, and many wonders and signs were done through the apostles. ⁴⁴Now all who believed were together, and had all things in common, ⁴⁵and sold their possessions and goods, and divided them among all, as anyone had need.

⁴⁶So continuing daily with one accord in the temple, and breaking bread from house to house, they ate their food with gladness and simplicity of heart, ⁴⁷praising God and having favor with all the people. And the Lord added to the church daily those who were being saved.

It is our intention to examine the nature and means of God's work of grace in bringing salvation to sinners that is set forth on Pentecost with particular emphasis on the work of the Holy Spirit. We had set forth an outline in which the Holy Spirit's work of grace may be considered in this passage. This included the following matters:

1. The Holy Spirit enables the gospel to be proclaimed (Acts 2:14-36).
2. The Holy Spirit illuminates sinners to biblical truth (2:37).
3. The Holy Spirit convicts sinners of their guilt and condemnation before God (2:37).
4. The Holy Spirit calls and enables sinners to repent and believe the gospel (2:38a).
5. The Holy Spirit commands and moves converts to be baptized (2:38b).
6. The Holy Spirit adds newly converted souls to the church (2:41, 47).
7. The Holy Spirit leads the new converts to enjoy and experience church fellowship (2:42-47).

We began to address the first of these last Lord's Day, in which...

I. The Holy Spirit enables the gospel to be proclaimed (Acts 2:14-36).

Under this heading, we have already affirmed the foundational truth that the Bible is the authoritative written Word of God through which God works His grace in the world to save sinners. But the Holy Spirit especially uses the preaching of His Word to convert sinners to Christ, that is, He blesses His gospel when proclaimed to the world through God-called, God-blessed men of God (cf. Rom. 10:13-15). The apostle Paul had once written, “It pleased God through the foolishness of the message preached to save those who believe” (1 Cor. 1:21).

Now before moving on, we want to emphasize one more matter under this first heading. When we examine the content of the gospel being proclaimed by the apostle Peter on the day of Pentecost, we see quite clearly that the content of the gospel that Peter proclaimed and that the Holy Spirit had inspired and blessed to the conversion of sinners was the onset and fulfillment of the messianic kingdom of David promised throughout the Old Testament Scriptures. Peter declared the gospel--the good news--of the inaugurated kingdom of God to the gathered Jewish crowd:

“Therefore let all the house of Israel know assuredly that God has made this Jesus, whom you crucified, both Lord and Christ.” (Acts 2:36)

When these thousands of souls were converted on the day of Pentecost, they had through repentance and faith entered into the newly inaugurated, spiritual kingdom of God over which Jesus was both Lord and Christ. Jesus had become the crucified, risen, enthroned King of kings and Lord of lords. The content of the gospel that the apostle Peter proclaimed on this occasion was the gospel of the kingdom of God. Entering the kingdom of God through faith and repentance in Jesus Christ the Lord was the work of God’s grace through the power of the Holy Spirit in bringing salvation to sinners. To become “saved” from sin through Jesus Christ is to enter into citizenship of the kingdom of God in which Jesus Christ reigns as King.

We may draw this scriptural lesson in attempting to win the lost of the world to salvation in Jesus Christ. If we desire and hope that the Holy Spirit will bless our efforts to evangelize the world in which the Lord has placed us, it is imperative that we proclaim the substance and content of the gospel that the Holy Spirit uses and blesses to the conversion of sinners. It is important, therefore, to evaluate and understand the gospel of the kingdom that the New Testament sets before us. And in doing so, it is important for us to evaluate and assess the “gospel” that is commonly proclaimed among evangelicals as to its nature and content. Is what is widely proclaimed today as the “gospel” in accordance with the gospel that the apostle Peter proclaimed on Pentecost, which the Lord greatly used to expand His kingdom?

A. The gospel of the kingdom and the “gospel” commonly proclaimed among evangelicals

It is unfortunate, even alarming, that the “gospel” commonly believed and proclaimed among evangelicals in today’s world does not address, emphasize, or even include the gospel of the kingdom of God.¹ The gospel of the kingdom was set aside, largely through American evangelicalism of the 20th century, and in its place the gospel was reshaped, redefined, and reduced only to a message that promises God’s forgiveness of sins through faith alone in Jesus Christ alone. In other words, the biblical doctrine of justification through faith alone in Christ alone, was set forth as the full, complete message of the gospel with the subject of the kingdom of God having been removed. Most presentations of today’s “gospel” in tracts, books, and sermons, are void of assertions that salvation is experienced by entering the kingdom of God. People are promised and assured of the forgiveness of their sins if they but believe rightly who Jesus is and that His death on the cross made atonement for sinners. What is declared to the world is that if a sinner but “accepts Christ as his personal Savior”, he has salvation. And so, many people in churches have embraced “a gospel” that in ways approaches what is the true gospel, but it falls short of what the Scriptures teach regarding the way of salvation. There is truth in what they have been taught, justification through faith alone is an essential doctrine that must be believed, but it is not the whole truth that is necessary to understand and

¹ We addressed this important matter in the past, in sermon FBC1081, delivered on the Lord’s Day, April 4, 2021. But it is such an important matter, it warrants its presentation again.

embrace in order to become the beneficiary of salvation by grace through faith in Jesus Christ. But the common appeal is made,

“If you simply accept Jesus Christ as your Savior, believing in your heart that He is God incarnate, who died for sinners on His cross and rose again the third day, you will become saved.”

This is then thought to be a one-time decision that forever settles the matter. It is viewed somewhat like a spiritual vaccine, taken once and the threat that sin poses to the soul is addressed and forever mitigated (removed).

This is such a common message that we might at first consider it to be true and adequate. We would say that it is true in what it says, but that it is inadequate, for it does not convey the full content of the gospel of salvation. People are quite willing to embrace this message and “accept Jesus” or “receive Him”, believing that they will be saved. But this deficient message will tend to produce deficient “Christians”, who are in actuality Christians in name only.

What, then, is deficient or what is missing in this aberrant message of salvation? Several points may be identified, but perhaps the major deficiency is the failure to call upon sinners to understand, believe, and submit to Jesus Christ as divinely appointed and enthroned King of kings and Lord of lords, without which no one will obtain salvation. In other words, the biblical gospel is the gospel of the kingdom of God that was inaugurated through the life, death, resurrection, and enthronement of Jesus Christ—Jesus is Lord. Simply to claim, “I have accepted Jesus as my personal Savior” says nothing respecting this essential truth of the gospel message of salvation that Jesus is Lord.

We could multiply the verses and whole passages of Scripture that speak to this important matter, and we will try to provide some of these today. But to begin our study let us consider the sermon proclaimed by the Apostle Peter on the Day of Pentecost, which occurred 50 days after our Lord had been crucified.

On the day of Pentecost Peter declared that God had exalted His Son, Jesus Christ, who was also the Son of David, to be both Lord and Christ. The word “Lord” speaks of the sovereign authority and power that God the Father had conferred upon Jesus. That God had made Jesus “Christ”, or the Anointed One, is the declaration that Jesus Christ is the promised King or Messiah of Israel who has begun His reign over the kingdom of God. Here is the footnote in the Reformation Study Bible on verse 36 of Acts 2:

In this climatic statement, Peter declares not only that Jesus is God’s Messiah (3:18, 20: 4:26; 5:42; Isa. 11:1; Luke 4:18-21), but also that He is the exalted Lord (Rom. 10:9; Phil. 2:9-11), and the conquering King (1 Cor. 15:24, 25; Rev. 19:16).²

It is at this time the people hearing Peter spoke up, clearly having been convicted in their minds and hearts of their sinful rebellion and rejection of their Messiah, having crucified Him. We read in Acts 2:37:

Now when they heard this, they were cut to the heart, and said to Peter and the rest of the apostles, “Men and brethren, what shall we do?”

They desired to know what they were to do in order to obtain salvation, for the Holy Spirit had convicted them and convinced them that they were under the wrath of God for having crucified the promised Messiah, the Son of David. Peter’s response to them is the way of salvation:

³⁸Then Peter said to them, “Repent, and let every one of you be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of sins; and you shall receive the gift of the Holy Spirit. ³⁹For the promise is to you and to your children, and to all who are afar off, as many as the Lord our God will call.”

Take note, Peter did not tell them, “Simply accept Jesus as your personal Savior (or “receive Him”) and you will be saved.” They needed to repent, that is, to turn from the way they had been thinking and

² R. C. Sproul, gen. ed., **The Reformation Study Bible** (Thomas Nelson Publishers, 1995), p. 2008.

living. They were to turn from their sin and submit unto the lordship of Jesus Christ, and begin to order their lives with Jesus as their Lord, their King, showing forth their repentance and faith through their baptism and the new way of life that their baptism signified. If they did so, then they could be assured of God forgiving them of their sins and that King Jesus would also give to them the gift of the Holy Spirit who would enable them to live holy lives within His kingdom. This promise of God was not restricted to those present who heard Peter on that day, but it was extended to everyone everywhere who similarly responded in repentance and faith.

Here is the truth that needs to be proclaimed far and wide, and in every church. If Jesus Christ is not your Lord, He is not your Savior. Unless you are submitted to Jesus the King over the kingdom of God, you are no citizen of the kingdom of God. You will not inherit the kingdom of the Father that He has promised to all who submit to His Son as their Lord, as their King.

And so, what is the gospel? What is it we are to proclaim and teach to our world? Yes, it is the good news of salvation from sin through faith in Jesus Christ secured for us through His life, crucifixion, and resurrection. But fully or completely, ***the gospel in the New Testament is the good news that the promised kingdom of God has been inaugurated through the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus Christ.***

B. The gospel of the kingdom in the New Testament

This message of the gospel of the kingdom is set forth throughout the New Testament.³ That it is a preeminent theme may be seen in the number of occasions the word, “kingdom” is found in the New Testament. The phrase, “the gospel of the kingdom” is found four times. The phrase, “the kingdom of heaven” which is synonymous with “the kingdom of God”, is used on 32 occasions, all in the Gospel of Matthew. “The kingdom of God” is found 70 times in the New Testament. The word, “kingdom” is used on 155 times. The kingdom of God is a pervasive theme and message of the New Testament.

We might sketch the concept of the messianic kingdom in the New Testament. When we consider the opening message of the New Testament, we read of the initial announcement that the days of expectation had arrived, that the kingdom of God was at hand. For example, we read in the birth narrative of Jesus in Luke 1 that the angel Gabriel appeared to Mary, announcing the birth of the King.

²⁹But when she saw him, she was troubled at his saying, and considered what manner of greeting this was. ³⁰Then the angel said to her, “Do not be afraid, Mary, for you have found favor with God. ³¹And behold, you will conceive in your womb and bring forth a Son, and shall call His name JESUS. ³²He will be great, and will be called the Son of the Highest; and ***the Lord God will give Him the throne of His father David.*** ³³***And He will reign over the house of Jacob forever, and of His kingdom there will be no end.***” (Luke 1:29-33)

Later in Luke 1 is the record of the prophecy of Zechariah, the father of John the Baptist. Inspired of the Holy Spirit Zechariah foretold the kingdom that would soon be inaugurated by the Son of David. It would be the kingdom of God in which its citizens enjoy the forgiveness of sins, the blessing promised to Abraham, even of their liberty to serve God without fear and in holiness. Zechariah blessed the Lord, because “has raised up ***a horn of salvation for us in the house of His servant David,*** (Luke 1:69). He declared that the promised Son of David was God’s instrument (horn) of salvation, who would reign over a kingdom in which His citizens will live in righteousness. Salvation is entering and living in this kingdom over which the Son of David reigns.

In the opening verses of the Gospel of Mark we read of “***the beginning of the gospel of Jesus Christ, the Son of God***” (Mark 1:1). Mark then quoted from Isaiah 40:3 a prophecy of the messenger who would precede the promised Messiah who would establish the kingdom of God.

³ We do not have the time today to set forth the teaching of the kingdom of God in the Old Testament that preceded the New Testament fulfillment; however, we did so in a measure in sermon FBC914, given on Sunday, September 10, 2017. It can be readily demonstrated that the entire Old Testament Scriptures anticipated the need and recorded the historical movement toward the realization of the kingdom of God set forth in the New Testament.

“Behold, I send My messenger before Your face,
Who will prepare Your way before You.”
“The voice of one crying in the wilderness:
‘Prepare the way of the LORD;
Make His paths straight.’”

Mark ties the gospel of Jesus Christ with the realization of the long-anticipated kingdom of God.

At the onset of the ministry of John the Baptist, we read in Matthew 3:1ff that John quoted this same passage in Isaiah, announcing the need to prepare for the onset of the kingdom of God.

In those days John the Baptist came preaching in the wilderness of Judea, ²and saying, “Repent, for ***the kingdom of heaven is at hand!***” ³For this is he who was spoken of by the prophet Isaiah, saying: “The voice of one crying in the wilderness: ‘Prepare the way of the LORD; make His paths straight.’”

Back in Mark 1, farther along in the chapter, we read of the beginning of the ministry of our Lord, identifying His central message:

¹⁴Now after John was put in prison, Jesus came to Galilee, preaching ***the gospel of the kingdom of God***, ¹⁵and saying, “The time is fulfilled, and ***the kingdom of God is at hand***. Repent, and believe ***in the gospel***.”

Here the gospel is defined as “the gospel of the kingdom.” This was the message that our Lord proclaimed throughout His Galilean ministry. We read in Matthew 4:23 at the beginning of His Galilean ministry:

“And Jesus went about all Galilee, teaching in their synagogues, preaching ***the gospel of the kingdom***, and healing all kinds of sickness and all kinds of disease among the people.”

The main theme of our Lord’s Sermon on the Mount was the kingdom of God, with particular emphasis on the ethics for kingdom citizens. The word, “kingdom”, is mentioned 9 times in the three chapters of Matthew 5, 6, and 7. The entire sermon could be understood as delineating the meaning of our Lord’s words, “***seek first the kingdom of God*** and His righteousness” (Matt. 6:33). In Matthew 8 our Lord promised that many ***Gentiles*** would be seated along with Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob in the kingdom of God. And then in Matthew 9:35 we have a summary of our Lord’s preaching ministry, which is almost identical to the description of His ministry at its beginning:

Then Jesus went about all the cities and villages, teaching in their synagogues, ***preaching the gospel of the kingdom***, and healing every sickness and every disease among the people. (Matt. 9:35)

Our Lord declared in Matthew 12:28 that the kingdom of God had been realized: “But if I cast out demons by the Spirit of God, ***surely the kingdom of God has come upon you***.”

All of the parables of Matthew 13 addressed the nature of the kingdom of God. IN the parable of the sower, in which Jesus told of a farmer scattering seed on various kinds of soil, Jesus said that the “seed” of the parable is “the word of the kingdom” (Matt. 13:19).

In contrast to the expectation of the Jewish people, who envisioned the promised Son of David to reign over a political kingdom with physical borders, in which the Jewish people would be pre-eminent over the Gentile nations, our Lord taught that the promised kingdom of God was of a much different nature. It was spiritual in nature. It would eventually encompass the entire world, but there would be unconverted people under the authority of this King in His kingdom, even tares among wheat, unconverted people intermixed with the citizens of this kingdom. But the day would come when the King would judge the world, separating “the wicked from among the just” (Matt. 13:49).

Our Lord continued to teach regarding the kingdom of God during His final journey to Jerusalem from Galilee. This travel narrative encompasses a large section of Luke's Gospel, from Luke 9:51 to 19:28. He taught of the *present* realization of the kingdom, the kingdom as manifested upon His ascension from the dead and through the present age, but also of its full and final *future* manifestation at His second coming.

The Lord Jesus taught that *experiencing salvation was entering His kingdom*. He said, "Assuredly, I say to you, whoever does not receive the kingdom of God as a little child will by no means enter it" (Luke 18:17). Eternal life was a benefit of possessing the kingdom. We read, "So He said to them, 'Assuredly, I say to you, there is no one who has left house or parents or brothers or wife or children, *for the sake of the kingdom of God*, who shall not receive many times more in this present time, and *in the age to come eternal life*'" (Luke 18:30).

While giving His Olivet Discourse, Jesus said these words to His disciples:" And *this gospel of the kingdom* will be preached in all the world as a witness to all the nations, and then the end will come." They were to be preaching the gospel of the kingdom, for when the gospel of the kingdom had been proclaimed in all the world, then the end would come (Matt. 24:14).

On Palm Sunday our Lord's entrance into Jerusalem was *the arrival of the Davidic King to Jerusalem*. Matthew wrote the inspired words, "All this was done that it might be fulfilled which was spoken by the prophet, saying:

"Tell the daughter of Zion,
'Behold, *your King is coming to you*,
Lowly, and sitting on a donkey,
A colt, the foal of a donkey.'" (Matt. 21:4)

This event was a fulfillment of the prophecy of Isaiah 62:11. The multitude in Jerusalem knew this and acknowledged it was so. All anticipated the appearance of the kingdom of God. We read, "Then the multitudes who went before and those who followed cried out, saying:

"Hosanna to the Son of David!
'Blessed is He who comes in the name of the LORD!
Hosanna in the highest!'" (Matt. 21:9)

While in Jerusalem during His Passion Week, our Lord continued to teach about the kingdom of God. He declared that though He was as a capstone rejected by the builders (Jewish leaders), alluding to His crucifixion, He would, nevertheless, be made the capstone, that is, the Ruler, the King, over the kingdom of God. "This was the Lord's doing" (Matt. 21:42). At the same time He declared that the Jewish leadership of Israel would not serve as leaders in His kingdom, rather, the kingdom of God would be taken from them. He declared, "Therefore I say to you, *the kingdom of God* will be taken from you and given to a nation bearing the fruits of it" (Matt. 21:43). He was referring to Him giving authority to His apostles to become the new leaders of reconstituted Israel. In Luke's Gospel we read of Jesus telling His apostles: "But you are those who have continued with Me in My trials. And I bestow upon you *a kingdom*, just as My Father bestowed one upon Me, that you may eat and drink at My table in My kingdom, and sit on thrones judging the twelve tribes of Israel" (Luke 22:28-30). Our Lord took the stewardship of Israel from the Jewish leaders and entrusted that leadership, oversight, to His twelve apostles over the twelve tribes of Israel. The Apostles are leaders in the spiritual Israel today, in that their witness as contained in our New Testament, governs our faith and life within the kingdom of God. Even at the last, when our Lord was crucified, what was it that the one thief asked Him, "Lord, remember me when You come into *Your kingdom*" (Luke 23:42). Thus we see that through the Gospels, that the kingdom of God is a major theme. It is central to our Lord's teaching. It is associated with, yes, even identified with the gospel. *The gospel of Jesus Christ is the gospel of the kingdom of God*. Biblical scholars have recognized and acknowledged this reality. As George Eldon Ladd expressed it in his classic biblical theology, *A Theology of the New Testament*: "Modern scholarship is quite unanimous in the opinion that the kingdom of God was the central message of Jesus."

We read also read of our Lord's post resurrection teaching of His apostles in **Luke 24:25ff**:

Then He said to them, “O foolish ones, and slow of heart to believe in all that the prophets have spoken! ²⁶Ought not the Christ to have suffered these things and *to enter into His glory?*” ²⁷And beginning at Moses and all the Prophets, He expounded to them in all the Scriptures the things concerning Himself.

Here, “His glory” is a reference to His rule as King over the kingdom of God. We see a continuity of God’s plan and purpose in our Lord’s rejection and crucifixion. His rejection did not thwart or postpone His enthronement; His death led to and resulted in His exaltation and enthronement. We recall the words of Psalm 2, in which it was prophesied that in spite of Israel’s rejection of Jesus as their promised King, the Father raised Him from the dead, and seated Him on His throne in heaven, having entrusted all authority in heaven and earth unto His Son.

Now however clear to us the subject of the kingdom of God is set forth as the state of salvation, there were some evangelicals in the past century, who severed most of the teachings of the Gospels respecting the kingdom of God from post resurrection teaching. They did not believe that the kingdom teaching of the Gospels was relevant for New Testament Christians. And due to their great influence on evangelicalism at the end of the 19th century and throughout the 20th century, the teaching of the kingdom of God was removed from much preaching and teaching respecting the gospel of Jesus Christ. They said that the Lord had offered the kingdom to Israel, which they taught was the promise of a 1,000 year long Jewish kingdom on earth, but upon Israel’s rejection of its King, God’s message changed, and the gospel that we are now to preach to the world emerged in its place. They said that we are not to proclaim the gospel of the kingdom; rather, we are to proclaim the gospel of the grace of God (as if there were a difference and distinction between these two). But when we continue to examine the Scriptures that record the faith and practice of the early church, it can be easily demonstrated that the emphasis on the kingdom of God continued into this church era. And so, let us continue past the Gospels into the book of Acts.

We read in Acts 1 that during the 40 days of His instruction to His disciples, He taught them concerning the kingdom of God. In fact, Luke speaks of this in the introduction to this second volume (i.e. Acts) as being the central issue at hand. We read,

The former account I made, O Theophilus, of all that Jesus began both to do and teach, ²until the day in which He was taken up, after He through the Holy Spirit had given commandments to the apostles whom He had chosen, ³to whom He also presented Himself alive after His suffering by many infallible proofs, being seen by them during forty days and *speaking of the things pertaining to the kingdom of God.* (Acts 1:1-3)

And again, what have we seen clearly, as to the substance of Peter’s sermon on the day of Pentecost? It was Peter’s declaration and explanation of what had transpired. He declared that wicked men, including Jews and Gentiles, conspired to put to death Jesus, because they would not yield to whom He claimed to be, even the Promised Messiah. He was the King, the Son of David. God had demonstrated this truth as to His true identity in so many different ways. But they rejected Him, crucifying Him. But God vindicated His Son by raising Him from the dead and enthroning Him over all of creation. Jesus Christ is Lord. Peter declared, “Therefore let all the house of Israel know assuredly that God has made this Jesus, whom you crucified, both Lord and Christ” (Acts 2:36). Peter declared that the kingdom of God had been realized.

Later in the book of Acts, when the Lord would send forth the Gospel into Samaria, we read of Philip’s preaching the gospel to them.

Therefore those who were scattered went everywhere preaching the word. ⁵Then Philip went down to the city of Samaria and preached Christ to them. ⁶And the multitudes with one accord heeded the things spoken by Philip, hearing and seeing the miracles which he did. ⁷For unclean spirits, crying with a loud voice, came out of many who were possessed; and many who were paralyzed and lame were healed. ⁸And there was great joy in that city. ⁹But there was a certain man called Simon, who previously practiced sorcery in the city and astonished the people of Samaria, claiming that he was someone great, ¹⁰to whom they all gave heed, from the least to the greatest, saying, “This man is the great power of

God.” ¹¹And they heeded him because he had astonished them with his sorceries for a long time. ¹²But when they believed Philip *as he preached the things concerning the kingdom of God* and the name of Jesus Christ, both men and women were baptized. (Acts 8:4-12)

The gospel that Philip preached to the Samaritans was the gospel of the kingdom.

Much later, we read of the Apostle Paul was exhorting and encouraging new Christians. In Acts 14 we have this recorded,

And when they had preached the gospel to that city and made many disciples, they returned to Lystra, Iconium, and Antioch, ²² strengthening the souls of the disciples, exhorting them to continue in the faith, and saying, “*We must through many tribulations enter the kingdom of God.*” (Acts 14:21f)

Here the final and full realization of the kingdom of God at the second coming of Christ is set before these believers. There will be difficulty, even many tribulations experienced by the people of God before entering the fulness of the kingdom of God.

When the Apostle Paul came to Ephesus and began to evangelize the city, we read of his ministry and message. “And he went into the synagogue and spoke boldly for three months, reasoning and persuading *concerning the things of the kingdom of God*” (Acts 19:8).

When Paul was on his third missionary journey, when returning to Jerusalem, he stopped in Asia Minor in order to meet with the elders of the church at Ephesus, who joined him in Miletus. We read Paul’s words to them:

“You know, from the first day that I came to Asia, in what manner I always lived among you, ¹⁹servicing the Lord with all humility, with many tears and trials which happened to me by the plotting of the Jews; ²⁰how I kept back nothing that was helpful, but proclaimed it to you, and taught you publicly and from house to house, ²¹testifying to Jews, and also to Greeks, repentance toward God and faith toward our Lord Jesus Christ. ²²And see, now I go bound in the spirit to Jerusalem, not knowing the things that will happen to me there, ²³except that the Holy Spirit testifies in every city, saying that chains and tribulations await me. ²⁴But none of these things move me; nor do I count my life dear to myself, so that I may finish my race with joy, and the ministry which I received from the Lord Jesus, to testify to *the gospel of the grace of God.* ²⁵ “And indeed, now I know that you all, *among whom I have gone preaching the kingdom of God,* will see my face no more. ²⁶Therefore I testify to you this day that I *am* innocent of the blood of all men. ²⁷For I have not shunned to declare to you the whole counsel of God. (Acts 20:18-27)

Here we read that He testified of *the gospel of the grace of God*, which involved his preaching *the kingdom of God*.

Let us look at the last few verses of the Book of Acts. The Apostle Paul is in Rome under house arrest. But the Lord had brought him there. And we read of the ministry he had among them in Rome.

²³So when they had appointed him a day, many came to him at his lodging, *to whom he explained and solemnly testified of the kingdom of God*, persuading them concerning Jesus from both the Law of Moses and the Prophets, from morning till evening. ²⁴And some were persuaded by the things which were spoken, and some disbelieved. ²⁵So when they did not agree among themselves, they departed after Paul had said one word: “The Holy Spirit spoke rightly through Isaiah the prophet to our fathers, ²⁶saying, ‘Go to this people and say:

“Hearing you will hear, and shall not understand;
And seeing you will see, and not perceive;
²⁷For the hearts of this people have grown dull.
Their ears are hard of hearing,
And their eyes they have closed,

Lest they should see with their eyes and hear with their ears,
Lest they should understand with their hearts and turn,
So that I should heal them.”

²⁸“Therefore let it be known to you that the salvation of God has been sent to the Gentiles, and they will hear it!” ²⁹ And when he had said these words, the Jews departed and had a great dispute among themselves.

³⁰Then Paul dwelt two whole years in his own rented house, and received all who came to him,
³¹***preaching the kingdom of God and teaching the things which concern the Lord Jesus Christ*** with all confidence, no one forbidding him” (Acts 28:23-31).

And so, we read in the book of Acts that the Lord Jesus as the risen and enthroned King over the kingdom of God continued to be a primary emphasis of teaching respecting the gospel and its expansion into the Romans world.

What we have considered should cause this truth to be abundantly clear and confirmed to all of us, that ***the gospel of Jesus Christ is vitally connected with the promised kingdom of God.*** Jesus Christ is Lord. The Old Testament Scriptures show forth that our fallen race is in need of a king, one who will come to rule over us, to deliver us from the power and condemnation of our sin. We are in need of a king to do for us and enable us to do what God has commanded of us. Jesus Christ is that promised King. He is the long-awaited Son of David, foretold in the prophets, who inaugurated the kingdom of God in which its citizens dwell in joy, peace, and righteousness. We enter into this kingdom through the new birth (John 3) which enables us to put our faith in Jesus Christ as Savior and Lord. And we must underscore that saving faith is manifest in believing on Jesus as Lord, submitting to His command to repent of sin and ordering life according to His will. God has entrusted to Him authority over all flesh. He has “gone into heaven and is at the right hand of God, angels and authorities and powers having been made subject to Him” (1 Pet. 3:22). The Father has entrusted to the Son of Man the authority to forgive sins. As the enthroned King He gives gifts to His people, principally the gift of the Holy Spirit whereby His people may walk in fellowship with Him and one another and progress in the holy walk unto the day when they gather to meet Him. For God has appointed a day “on which He will judge the world in righteousness by the Man whom He has ordained. He has given assurance of this to all by raising Him from the dead” (Acts 17:31).

Christ is currently Lord of lords and King of kings. He declared. “All authority has been given to me in heaven and earth” (Matt. 28:18). The Jews rejection of Jesus did not thwart Jesus Christ becoming King; their rejection of Him and crucifying Him was the very means and grounds upon which the Father raised Him from the dead and gave Him all kingly authority in heaven and on earth.

And yet here we are today. It is a sad thing that many evangelicals do not believe Jesus Christ is the sovereign ruling Lord of heaven and earth. They say, “He is the Savior, but He will not rule as king until His second coming.” I know of one pastor (who claims to be reformed in his soteriology—he strongly espouses the doctrines of grace) who said, “If Jesus is King now He’s doing a pretty lousy job.” That is not only unbiblical, but it is blasphemous. Salvation is presented in terms exclusively on how one may be forgiven by God of one’s sins. The gospel has been reduced to a message of justification by grace through faith alone. In the gospel proclamation little is said about aspects of salvation other than the forgiveness of sins, as important and foundational that blessing is. Most tracts are a presentation of some form of justification only. But justification speaks to no change in a person whatsoever. Justification has to do with our legal standing before God. It has to do with a declaration of God regarding His people. But justification does not address the other aspects in salvation, particularly direct teaching touching on the kingdom of God. To be saved one needs not only to be delivered from the penalty of sin, but also from the love of sin, the power of sin, and ultimately the presence of sin. If we are promising the forgiveness of sins apart from being delivered from the love of, tyranny of, and the defilement of sin, we are not representing the biblical gospel. If we offer Jesus as Savior but to submit to Him as Lord is optional, we have departed from the biblical gospel.

How may we conclude this matter? We might say it this way. Salvation is not conferred upon sinners because they “accept Jesus Christ as their Savior. People are saved when Jesus Christ accepts them through

their faith in Him as Lord and Christ.” To those who humble themselves, acknowledge their guilt and inability to do anything to commend them before God, but believe and submit unto Him alone as Lord and Savior, they may be assured of the Lord granting freely full salvation. The concluding word of Psalm 2 gives forth the command as to how we are to respond to the risen and enthroned Son of David:

Serve the Lord with fear,
And rejoice with trembling.
Kiss the Son (in humble submission), lest He be angry,
And you perish in the way,
When His wrath is kindled but a little.
Blessed are all those who put their trust in Him. (Psalm 2:11, 12)

The present-day departure of much of evangelicalism from The gospel of the kingdom

The question needs to be answered, **How did we get to this place and why has it not been corrected?** I would argue one of the major reasons is *the rise and immense influence of dispensational theology* on evangelicalism in the latter 19th century and the early 20th century. Until this time all of Christianity, including Roman Catholic and all Protestant teaching, taught and emphasized the realization of the kingdom of God in the resurrection and exaltation of Jesus Christ being enthroned in heaven. But this changed among evangelicals of the 20th century. C. I. Scofield's Study Bible was published by Oxford University Press in the early 20th century. It came upon the scene at the ideal time for its widespread use by evangelicals.⁴ As Bible-believers came out of the liberal mainline denominations, they started their own churches, denominations, mission agencies, Bible colleges and seminaries. The Scofield Study Bible became the Bible believer's study Bible and Scofield's dispensationalism became the predominant theology of evangelicals. I believe that due to the influence of errant dispensational teaching of the kingdom, evangelicalism has been prevented from recovering and restoring this central message of the kingdom of God to our gospel proclamation.

Dispensational theology has viewed the New Testament announcement of the kingdom of God at hand, as God having offered to the nation of Israel the glorious restoration of the Davidic kingdom, if they accepted Jesus as their promised Messiah. But they claim that this Davidic kingdom would be realized as a national, political, and geographical fulfillment of promises, which were given unconditionally to the ethnic Jewish people. Although Jesus taught in everyplace and in every way that the Jews had a wrong concept of the promised kingdom of God, dispensationalists say that the Jewish people had a true understanding of the future messianic kingdom promised Israel in the Old Testament. They claimed that in John the Baptist's announcement and the announcement of Jesus of the kingdom of heaven at hand, what was being taught was that God was offering Israel the kingdom, in other words, the promised 1,000 year Jewish millennium in which Israel would dominate the gentile nations of the world. But because Israel rejected Jesus as their promised king, God withdrew His offer of the kingdom. Dispensationalism teaches that God postponed the inauguration of that kingdom until the Second Coming of Jesus Christ. And so, this age is a parenthetical age of grace, not the age of the kingdom. Therefore, the message of the kingdom of God was removed from the gospel. Jesus will not be Lord and king until His second coming. Actually, the early, classical dispensationalists taught that there was a difference between expressions, "the kingdom of heaven" and the "the kingdom of God." Because Jesus was rejected as king, He would not be king over the kingdom of heaven until His second coming. They have taught that Jesus is our Prophet and Priest in this current age, but not King. When God withdrew His offer of the kingdom from Israel, in its place God purposed to found and build His church throughout this age. But when He raptures His church at a future point in time, then God will once again move to establish this earthly Jewish kingdom on earth. The gospel of the kingdom will once again be proclaimed to the Jews after the rapture of the church and during a future seven year tribulation. The conclusion and result of this theology was the setting aside of the message of the kingdom, for it was not of the gospel of Jesus Christ to the world in this age. The gospel of the kingdom is a different message than the gospel of salvation through faith in Jesus Christ. The result was that due to dispensational teaching, declaring that Jesus is Lord is not the message of the gospel in this church age.

For example, here is a note that one dispensational study Bible has regarding the message of John the Baptist, of which he declared, "Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand":

This is the rule of heaven over the earth. The Jewish people of Christ's day were looking for this messianic or Davidic kingdom to be established on this earth, and this is what John declared was "near."

⁴ First published in 1909 and then in 1917.

The requirement that people must repent in order for the kingdom to be established was new and became a stumbling block to them. The rejection of Christ by the people delayed its establishment until the second coming of Christ (25:31).⁵

Dispensationalism teaches that the gospel of the kingdom is different in content than the gospel the church is to proclaim. But they say that the gospel of the kingdom will again be proclaimed in a future tribulation period to tribulation saints, after the church is removed from the world. Here is their interpretation of Matthew 24:14, in which our Lord Jesus told His disciples, “And this gospel of the kingdom will be preached in all the world as a witness to all the nations, and then the end will come”:

“This is the good news that will be preached during the tribulation concerning the coming of the Messiah and the setting up of His kingdom.”⁶

The point that we are asserting is that dispensational theology has contributed greatly to this truncated gospel being proclaimed, one that is largely silent respecting the doctrine of the kingdom of God. The classical dispensational view teaches that our Lord failed to inaugurate the kingdom of God, because He was rejected by the Jews. It is taught that He will be “successful” when He returns a second time when He then will establish the kingdom that He failed to do when He first came. To me this is near to blasphemy.

Now it is true that since the 1980s progressive dispensationalists⁷ have corrected some of the excesses and extremes of the earlier classical dispensationalists. Thankfully, progressive dispensationalists emphasize Lordship salvation, including the realization of a present kingdom with Jesus Christ as the reigning King. But although they reformed this matter to a degree, they still have a way to go. For they do not believe, and therefore do not proclaim, that Jesus Christ is enthroned over the promised Davidic kingdom. They, too, believe that will not occur until the second coming of Jesus Christ. In other words they retain the belief that the promises of the kingdom in the Old Testament are not fulfilled in this church age. As one noted in his study Bible,

“The streams of the Abrahamic, Davidic, and New Covenants find their confluence in the millennial kingdom ruled over by the Messiah.”⁸

The progressive dispensationalists continue to promote the doctrine that there are two separate promised kingdoms, one ruled over by Jesus Christ presently, but another, the Davidic kingdom, to be ushered in and ruled over by Jesus Christ after His second coming. Consider these footnotes in a study Bible of a prominent progressive dispensationalist regarding verses in Ezekiel 19:

“The house of David ended in shame and, for nearly 2,600 years since, Israel has had no king of David’s line. When Messiah came, they rejected Him and preferred Caesar. Messiah still became their Savior and will return their King...” God will someday rule over Israel in the glorious kingdom of Messiah.”⁹

⁵ Charles Ryrie, **Ryrie Study Bible**, Expanded Edition (Moody Press, 1986, 1994), p.1462.

⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 1505.

⁷ There emerged in the 1980’s a group of dispensationalists who distanced themselves from earlier dispensational teaching that the kingdom was postponed and that Jesus Christ was not presently reigning. Instead they rightly taught that Jesus Christ is presently Lord or King over His kingdom. They refer to themselves as progressive dispensationalists. But they continue to maintain that there will be a future 1,000 Jewish kingdom or millennium that will be distinct from the present kingdom of God. They believe in two kingdoms of Christ, one in which Jesus reigns in the kingdom of God and the second when He will one day reign in a restored Davidic kingdom in a 1,000 year Jewish kingdom on earth. The Scriptures teach that there is only one kingdom of God, which is present now, but which will be fully manifested at Christ’s second coming continuing into eternity.

⁸ John MacArthur, **The MacArthur Study Bible** (Thomas Nelson, 1997), p. 1107.

⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 1176.

Here is his note on Micah 7:20.

In spite of Israel's unfaithfulness to God, the Lord intends to fulfill His unconditional promises in the Abrahamic covenant made with Abraham and confirmed with Isaac and Jacob (cf. Gen. 12, 15, 17, 22, 26, 28, 35). When enacted in conjunction with the Davidic Covenant, Israel will again be restored as a people and a nation to the land originally promised to Abraham. Jesus Christ, the ultimate descendant of David, will rule from Jerusalem over the world as King of Kings and Lord of Lords (cf. Rev. 17:14, 19:16).¹⁰

Here is one more quotation, a note on the text of Zechariah 9:9 and 10:

OT prophets didn't see the great time period between the two comings. The church age was a "mystery" hidden from them (cf. 3:1-9; Col. 1:27).¹¹

The progressive dispensationalists, like the classical dispensationalists that preceded them, continue to view all of the Old Testament promises of the coming kingdom not to be prophecies of our Lord's present reign as the sovereign Lord of lords and King of kings. They believe that all of the Old Testament prophets foretell of a future earthly kingdom when Jesus Christ at His Second Coming will then be coronated as King. And so, when they come to the New Testament Scriptures, they must force their comments to conform to their assumptions regarding Old Testament teaching. The result is a diminishment of the importance and stripping the content of the nature and role of the realized kingdom of God from the gospel of Jesus Christ.

In conclusion, we affirm that at the heart of the New Testament is this message: Jesus Christ is Lord. "Whosoever (through life) calls upon the name of the Lord will be saved" from damnation on the Day of Judgment. Only kingdom citizens, ones who have bowed their knees and confessed with their mouth in this life that Jesus is Lord, will be granted an inheritance in the kingdom of the Father who promised it to them. To them only will King will say, "Come, you blessed of My Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world" (Matt. 25:34).

¹⁰ Ibid., p. 1308. Note that in his study Bible he capitalized the second "Kings" and "Lords." These should be lower case.

¹¹ Ibid., p. 1350.