

The Gospel of The Kingdom

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Dear brothers and sisters in Christ *Yeshua*:

I never expected to write about the Gospel. And yet, I find myself needing to clarify the *biblical* Gospel in the light of a rising movement, even within the church, redefining what the Bible says about this subject.

If you search on the internet, you will quickly discover some of the many other gospels out there. There is a social gospel, also called social constructivism. There are the gospel of science, Christian humanism, and the list goes on and on.

Let us begin this teaching with the basic definition of the Christian Gospel. The "Gospel" is the teaching about the revelation of Christ, and it communicates a set of principles and beliefs that are absolute truths about God and humanity. These truths communicate God's message concerning both personal salvation and His future Kingdom.ⁱ And so, the complete Gospel has two parts. We see that one is private and the other is corporate to the body of Christ. We will discuss both.

Concerning salvation, Jesus said, *"I am the way, the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through Me."* (John 14:6, NKJV).ⁱⁱ *"I am He who lives, and was dead, and behold, I am alive forevermore. Amen. And I have the keys of Hades and of Death"* (Revelation 1:18). *"Most assuredly, I say to you, unless one is born [a]gain, he cannot see the kingdom of God"* (John 3:3). *"And this is eternal life, that they may know You, the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom You have sent"* (John 17:3).

On the Day of Pentecost, the Apostle Peter declared: *"And it shall come to pass that whoever calls on the name of the Lord shall be saved"* (Acts 2:21). *"Nor is there salvation in any other, for there is no other name under heaven given among men by which we must be saved"* (Acts 4:12).

Christian theologians have raised many questions about salvation. For example: What does it mean to be born again? How about that person who has never heard of Jesus? What about children that do not yet fully comprehend their need for a Savior? And can we accept Christ after we die, and is there a second chance or purgatory?

I do not know with certainty the answer to some of these questions. However, I would not bet my life on a delayed decision to accept Christ as my Lord and Savior; for it is written, *"And do*

this, knowing the time, that now it is high time to awake out of sleep; for now our salvation is nearer than when we first believed" (Romans 13:11).

One thing is clear from scripture. Salvation is simple to understand, even for a child. And I feel it is essential for us Christians not to complicate God's path of salvation. The church sharing the good news of Jesus is the message of the Gospel. And this good news is His love for us and His desire to forgive humanity for its sinful and fallen condition.

This good news is also His promise of our resurrection and eternal life in Him, making us a new creation. In other words, we get a clean slate and a new beginning. Everything about this current life and the difficulties found in the world will one day soon fade away, and we will enter His glorious Kingdom for eternity. Now that is good news!

One important detail about salvation is that it is a gift from God. We cannot do anything to earn it. Why? Because we never deserved it in the first place. As I read through the Bible, I am reminded of just how far humanity has fallen short of God's perfection. Even the nation of Israel disastrously rebelled against the Lord until He destroyed their kingdom and scattered them to the farthest ends of the earth.

Some view these scriptures through the lens of an angry God. I do not. I feel God's broken heart on nearly every page of the Bible. For example, the Lord said to Israel, *"Come now, and let us reason together, says the Lord" (Isaiah 1:18)*. Have you ever spoken those words to a rebellious child? It breaks my heart to think of all the times I tried to protect my children from their self-destructive choices. At some point, I had to let go, believing they would return one day to the right path.

The Gospel is like the Lord saying: I had tried for thousands of years to steer humanity in the right direction, always encouraging them to make good and wise decisions but severely punishing them when they did not. Now, I yield my anger towards my rebellious children, declaring:ⁱⁱⁱ *"I have blotted out, like a thick cloud, your transgressions, And like a cloud, your sins. Return to Me, for I have redeemed you" (Isaiah 44:22)*.

I can also hear the Lord saying: I will no longer curse the earth for your rebellion. I will deal with your sin and sinful nature. You defiled my creation, and yet, I will forgive the debt you owe Me. I will annul your covenant with death.^{iv} I will demonstrate unconditional and unmerited favor and love towards you. I will heal you. I will restore you to your pre-fallen condition. I will make an eternal and unbreakable covenant of peace with you,^v and I will give my life for yours to officiate this New covenant of blood.^{vi} Now that is love!

"Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace, goodwill toward men!" (Luke 2:14).

And the only thing we must do to receive this covenant of peace is to say "yes" to God's plan of salvation, to believe that Jesus is our Savior, and surrender to the truth that we have sinned against God and that Jesus has paid the cost for our redemption. It is that simple.

Unfortunately, this is where some theological opinions begin to drift away from this simple truth. They misconstrue the writings of James, believing that good works (faith plus works) are also required for salvation. James said, *"What does it profit, my brethren, if someone says he has faith but does not have works? Can faith save him? Thus also faith by itself, if it does not have works, is dead. But someone will say, 'You have faith, and I have works.' Show me your faith without your works, and I will show you my faith by my works"* (James 2:14, 17-18).

Let us break this down for a moment. Paul said, *"For by grace you have been saved through faith, and that not of yourselves; it is the gift of God"* (Ephesians 2:8). The implication here is that faith alone is required for salvation. Not exactly. Paul said that *grace* is necessary for salvation and that God's grace works *through* our faith. However, even our faith is not of ourselves, but a gift of God, as He has given each one a measure of faith so that we might believe.^{vii} In other words, faith activates God's grace to save us.

In other words, our faith does not save us. God's grace saves us. Faith is a gift from God so that we *might* believe that He has saved us *by* His grace. Therefore, we are *only* saved by grace and nothing else. And yet, without faith, we could never see God's grace, and therefore, never say "yes" to His offer to forgive and grant us eternal life. So, how much of our salvation can we take credit for? Nothing, except that we chose to say "yes." Our ability to decide is what some theologians call "free will."

Now, with this understanding, can we, in any way, add to our salvation? Absolutely not. Therefore, James was not declaring that salvation requires our faith plus good works. He said that if we have faith to believe that Christ is our Savior, then the outcome of that belief, the manifestation of our faith, is love towards God and others demonstrated *by* our good works. And for what purpose are we to show these good works? Jesus said, *"Let your light so shine before men, that they may see your good works and glorify your Father in heaven"* (Matthew 5:16).

In other words, our good works are not to earn or enhance our salvation. Our good works are for others to see the love of God in us, so they might also believe in Christ for their salvation. Our good works are part of our testimony of God's transforming work in our lives. And James is reminding us that if we do *not* display God's love for others, then somewhere in our relationship with the Lord, we are missing His transformation of our souls and daily renewal of our minds. And worse, we may be resisting the Holy Spirit and following our old nature—the carnality of the flesh.

Not demonstrating good works has nothing to do with our salvation. But it has everything to do with our ongoing sanctification. Sanctification begins when we accept Christ and continues for the rest of our lives until Christ perfects us at our resurrection. Sanctification is a result of our salvation and not the other way around. Some people naively believe that God will not save them until they are sanctified. That is what I would call "the works of the flesh" or "a religious spirit."

Therefore, the Gospel is not just a one-time message for salvation. When life overwhelms us, the Gospel becomes our daily message, reminding us that God has already saved us by His grace and comforted us in the knowledge of our future resurrection in Christ and eternal life in His Kingdom.

If we return for a moment to all these other gospels, we begin to see their futility. Science cannot save us nor any social engineering of our culture. And Christian humanism? Do not even get me started on that topic. This world is quickly drifting away from Orthodox Christianity towards secular humanism, where seemingly good people can create a comfortable world apart from God. It will never happen. And this brings me to my last topic—the Kingdom of God.

Most of Jesus's sermons were about His Kingdom (which He also called the Kingdom of Heaven). The Kingdom of God and the Kingdom of Heaven are effectively the same. Jesus repeatedly said: *"Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand!" (Matthew 3:2)*. However, what did He mean by "at hand?" Was He implying that the Kingdom was now established on the earth? Not exactly.

The disciples asked Jesus, *"Lord, will You at this time restore the kingdom to Israel?" (Acts 1:6)*. Jesus lovingly answered, "no." For now, the Kingdom of God, and more importantly, the King, is living in our hearts. So yes, the Kingdom is at hand, but it is not here on the earth yet. In the Book of Revelation, we read that when the angel blows the seventh trumpet, loud voices in heaven will declare: *"The kingdoms of this world have [now] become the kingdoms of our Lord and of His Christ, and He shall reign forever and ever!" (Revelation 11:15)*.

The promise of this future Kingdom is part of the Gospel—the good news. It is written, *"By faith he [Abraham] dwelt in the land of promise as in a foreign country, dwelling in tents with Isaac and Jacob, the heirs with him of the same promise; for he waited for the city which has foundations, whose builder and maker is God" (Hebrews 11:9-10)*. And Jesus said, *"My Kingdom is not of this world" (John 18:36)*.

The first four books of the New Testament (Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John) are called the Gospels. The first three are referred to as synoptic gospels because they appear written from the same source material. Of these three, it is believed that Mark was written first, and the other two were sourced directly from Mark.

The question is this. Can we fully understand the Gospel by only reading four out of sixty-six books of the Bible? Regarding salvation, certainly yes. I did not find eternal salvation reading the Book of Genesis. God saved me when I read about Jesus in the Book of Matthew.

However, regarding the Gospel of the Kingdom, we need the whole Bible—New and Old Testaments. Absent the Books of Moses, how would we know about God's covenant with Abraham? Absent the Hebrew writings, how would we discover God's covenant with King David? And absent the prophecies, how would we believe God's redemptive promises for Israel? Even the Book of Revelation adds clarity about the new heaven and earth and the New Jerusalem.

Therefore, Paul said, *“For I have not shunned to declare to you the whole counsel of God” (Acts 20:27).*

Yeshua spoke plainly to His disciples, saying it had been given to us to know the mysteries of the Kingdom of Heaven.^{viii} To Peter, He said, *“And I will give you the keys of the kingdom of heaven” (Matthew 16:19).* Keys in the Jewish tradition represent knowledge and understanding. Thus, it is written, *“When anyone hears the word of the kingdom, and does not understand it, then the wicked one comes and snatches away what was sown in his heart” (Matthew 13:19).* In other words, the enemy steals the faith planted in the heart and thereby prevents that person from understanding the Kingdom of God.

Unfortunately, fewer Christians today are willing to share their faith with others, a twenty-five percent drop in the last twenty-five years.^{ix} Silencing us is another strategy of our enemy. I hear some Christians say: *“Preach the Gospel at all times. Use words if necessary.”* This quote they attribute to Saint Francis of Assisi, founder of the Franciscan order, implying it is more important to demonstrate the Gospel than to preach it. There is only one problem. He never said it, and in fact, he was an avid preacher of the Gospel.^x

Paul said this about preaching the Gospel: *“How then shall they call on Him in whom they have not believed? And how shall they believe in Him of whom they have not heard? And how shall they hear without a preacher?” (Romans 10:14).* We must preach the Gospel, at the minimum, the Gospel of salvation. This is the first step in fulfilling the great commission. The second step is the discipleship of all the nations and requires teaching the whole Gospel, including the Gospel of the Kingdom.^{xi}

In 1974, Billy Graham found himself in the middle of a heated dispute within the evangelical Christian community. Expounding on what James wrote, some argued that preaching the Gospel required more than just words. They questioned, did the demonstration of the Gospel also need action, even for moral and just social causes? They noted prominent names such as William Wilberforce as examples of Christians that took responsibility for establishing God’s biblical law on society. Hence the definition for the social gospel was formed.

Billy Graham eventually agreed to expand the focus of his movement to include some level of practicing social justice.^{xii} This effort was an appeasement to help reunite the evangelical community around the primary responsibility of the church to communicate the Gospel. Graham and others convened in Lausanne, Switzerland, and drafted a manifesto that called for a new kind of Christian social responsibility. The text reads in part:

“Because men and women are made in the image of God, every person, regardless of race, religion, colour, culture, class, sex or age, has an intrinsic dignity because of which he or she should be respected and served, not exploited. Here too we express penitence both for our neglect and for having sometimes regarded evangelism and social concern as mutually exclusive.”

As Christians, we *are* called to hate evil and love good, establishing justice in the courts of our cities.^{xiii} Therefore, I fully agree with our responsibility to pursue righteousness and seek justice for those who are unable, as it is written, *“Righteousness and justice are the foundation of Your throne; Mercy and truth go before Your face” (Psalm 89:14)*. However, little of this will communicate the Gospel of salvation unless someone preaches our need for a Savior.

So, the Gospel is both the good news of our immediate salvation in Christ and the good news of our future resurrection and eternal life into the Kingdom of God. For the time in between, the good news we share and the good works we demonstrate are the testimony of the Gospel of salvation to those perishing.

If we do one without the other, our testimony of Christ to others will ring with the shallowness of a clanging cymbal. As Paul said, *“And though I have the gift of prophecy, and understand all mysteries and all knowledge, and though I have all faith, so that I could remove mountains, but have not love, I am nothing” (1 Corinthians 13:2)*.

Therefore, let us preach the entire Gospel of the Kingdom to all men, with confidence and most importantly, with love^{xiv}—preaching the Gospel unto the salvation for those who are perishing, and the Gospel of the Kingdom to those who are already disciples of Christ.

Amen!

ⁱ Merriam-Webster and Lexico, Powered by Oxford.

ⁱⁱ All Scripture quotations are taken from the New King James Bible (NKJV) unless otherwise noted, Thomas Nelson Inc., 1982.

ⁱⁱⁱ Genesis 6:3. Psalm 103:9.

^{iv} Isaiah 28:18.

^v Ezekiel 34:25.

^{vi} Zechariah 9:11. Matthew 26:28.

^{vii} Romans 12:3.

^{viii} Matthew 13:11.

^{ix} Sharing Faith is Increasingly Optional to Christians. Barna Group and Lutheran Hour Ministries.

^x Stanton, Glen. FactChecker: Misquoting Francis of Assisi. TGC U.S. Edition, Bible & Theology.

^{xi} Matthew 28:19.

^{xii} Griswold, Eliza. Billy Graham’s Striking Gospel of Social Action. The New Yorker, Cultural Comment.

^{xiii} Amos 5:15.

^{xiv} 1 Corinthians 13:13.