

Focus on the Kingdom

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Anthony Buzzard, editor

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27th Theological Conference

May 3-6, 2018

Calvin Center, Hampton, GA

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Please arrange your arrival time on Thursday early enough to catch one of the two shuttle runs. On Sunday, May 6 we will provide **only 1** shuttle run. In order to allow you enough time to catch your return flight, we suggest you not book your return flight prior to 3:30 pm. The conference begins with registration at 4 pm on Thursday and ends with lunch on Sunday. Driving directions to Calvin Center are at calvincenter.org. The address is 13550 Woolsey Rd., Hampton, GA 30228.

The Land Promise to Abraham and His Descendants — the Key to the Whole Bible Plot

Underlying the entire Bible story, running like a golden thread through Scripture, is the promise made to Abraham that he would receive, as a reward for his obedience to God's call to leave Ur of the Chaldees, **prosperity, progeny, and property**. This amazing, divinely promised guarantee of success, which Christians are invited to share as spiritual children of Abraham, is summed up in the compact phrase "the blessing of Abraham." This beautiful and memorable phrase is found only twice in Scripture, in Galatians 3:14 and Genesis 28:4. This provides the essential link between the two Testaments.

That blessing of **prosperity, progeny and property** (renewed **land** forever) is defined by Paul in Romans 4:13 as "the promise to Abraham and to his descendants that he would be heir of the world" (equivalent to "earth," BBE, Basic Bible in English). This is exactly the promise of Jesus to his followers in Matthew 5:5. "The meek are to inherit the **earth/land**," citing the amazing Psalm 37 which no less than *five* times defines the goal and destiny of the faithful (Ps. 37:9, 11, 22, 29, 34). It is not remotely about "going to heaven," which is a huge falsehood!

I need to repeat this! This has not a word to say about "going to heaven as a disembodied soul at death." To confirm this point, note the fearless words of Dr. J.A.T. Robinson at Cambridge: "'Heaven' is in fact never used in the Bible for the destination of the dying" (*In the End God*, p. 104). You get a very different impression at funerals and in commonly heard sermons! The only recognizable goal of the believer is "heaven." **But not according to Scripture.**

The biblical drama hangs on this remarkable tension: Abraham and his seed have **never yet inherited** the land/earth. In fact Stephen, in the sermon which cost him his life (Acts 7, the longest chapter in that book), explicitly says that "Abraham did not inherit as much as a square foot of the promised land"! But "God promised it to him and his seed" (Acts 7:5). That marvelous promise is rooted of course in Genesis 12, 13, 15 and constantly throughout the Hebrew Bible. See Hebrews 11:13, 39.

How is that staggering promise to find fulfillment, since Abraham is long dead? God will indeed as always be vindicated. The obvious and only solution is that

Abraham will have to be resurrected when Jesus comes back in order to take up his allotted place in the **Kingdom/land** of the new order to be introduced by Jesus. Hebrews 11:8 clearly recalls that Abraham once lived in the promised land, as did his children, but in verses 13 and 39, “these [heroes of the OT] all died, **not** having received the promises.” There it is! Everything hinges on the faithful attaining to the inheritance of the **earth/land** as promised to the meek by Jesus in Matthew 5:5 and unpacked in more detail in Revelation 5:10 (cp. Rev. 2:26-27; 3:21; 20:1-6; Jer. 27:5). Not only do they gain the earth, they rule and reign as kings with Jesus in it (Rev. 2:26; 1 Cor. 6:2; Dan. 7:27: “under heaven...obey the saints.” See RSV, etc).

Add to this the astonishing promise of Jesus to Peter, who inquired as to what **reward** the Apostles might expect (Matt. 19:27), after all the exhausting trouble and maltreatment they had received from the established “church.” Jesus’ answer was transparent. In that new-born world when the Son of Man returns to the earth and takes up his position on his throne of glory, the Apostles will also occupy 12 thrones and set about the task of governing the tribes re-gathered at that time in the land (see Matt. 19:28; Luke 22:28-30, and put these verses up on your refrigerator!). The reference of course is to the new order of society foreseen by all the prophets (Acts 3:21), and especially in Isaiah 65:17ff. and 66:22. All the prophets spoke of the glorious future of our earth.

There is coming a new world order on earth, to be inaugurated at the return of Jesus, and we are urged by the Gospel of the Kingdom, the Christian Gospel, to prepare with all urgency for that coming event. This is the substance of Christian hope and Gospel, and hope is the basis, Paul said, for the companion virtues of love and faith (Col. 1:4-5). Without a proper grasp of **hope**, faith and love are diminished and thwarted. **It matters very much what you believe.** Believing and having a passion for truth is of paramount importance (2 Thess. 2:10), and a condition for salvation, Paul said. The Christian faith is called “the faith of Abraham” (Rom. 4:16), and Abraham is the spiritual father of the faithful (Rom. 4:11). No wonder then that the Gospel was preached in advance to Abraham (Gal. 3:8). This in short is the **Gospel of the Land/Kingdom**, the Gospel as preached by Jesus and Paul (Mark 1:14-15; Luke 4:43; Acts 19:8; 20:24-25; 28:23, 31), which is conspicuous by its absence in churches and preaching! For further detail please read my *The Coming Kingdom of the Messiah: A Solution to the Riddle of the New Testament* (free at our site). Also my *Our Fathers Who Aren't in Heaven*. For a short summary see our ten-minute YouTube video “Jesus Is Still a Jew.”

Here then is the easy story of the whole Bible, to be taught to the old and the young alike. God is working to

restore peace to our tortured earth, using His agent the Messiah and Son of God. Luke 1:35 explains with lucid simplicity the basis for Jesus being the Son of God. (Do not read KJV on this verse. It misleads you into thinking there is more than one reason for Jesus’ Sonship!) Jesus, **the lord Messiah** (Luke 2:11, **Messiah lord**) was fathered in the womb of Mary by miracle (Matt. 1:20, “**begotten** in her,” as the Greek reads). He certainly did not arrive from a pre-human life elsewhere! He announced the Kingdom of God, which is to bring about the reversal of the calamity which came to the human race in Adam and Eve. Mark 1:14-15 commands us **to stop not believing in the destiny of man, which is to rule in the Kingdom**, the very task at which Adam failed. Jesus, the perfect and sinless human person, the second Adam, modeled the perfect Christian life, devoted to the will of his Father, who is the one and only God of **true monotheism** (John 17:3; 1 Cor. 8:4-6). Jesus affirmed belief in the unitary monotheistic God of his biblical heritage (Deut. 6:4; Mark 12:29). Jesus also confirmed the promises made to the fathers of the Hebrew Bible (Rom. 15:8). Thus the Christian Gospel was **preached in advance to Abraham** (Gal. 3:8). The promise was that the faithful believers should receive the whole world as their inheritance (Jer. 27:5). The promise to Abraham was specified as the guarantee that he would be “heir of the world” (Rom. 4:13). Thus the **land promise** to Abraham is exactly the **Kingdom of God promise** of the New Covenant, and Jesus stated this by promising possession of the earth/land to the meek (Matt. 5:5; Rev. 5:10: “on the earth”).

The fascinating fact is that Abraham has until this day not received a square foot of his inheritance. Acts 7:5 is a marvelous “John 3:16” verse! The point to be gained is that Abraham and all the faithful who are now dead, sleeping the sleep of death (Ps. 13:3; Ecc. 9:5, 10), must at the one return (Parousia) of Jesus rise from death (1 Cor. 15:23; Rev. 11:15-18) to receive their promised inheritance (so also Daniel in Dan. 12:2, 13). The ideal conditions on earth will then be introduced, and such scenes as Isaiah 65:17ff and 66:22, where surviving mortals (not the saints who will by then have gained immortality) will be considered exceptional and unfortunate, or even under judgment, if they die at the age of 100! Long life for mortals will be the “new normal.”

Jesus and his disciples loved and looked forward to the great “restoration of all things.” (Acts 1:6; 3:21) There is to be a rebirth (*palingenesis*) of the world, when the Messiah will be sitting on the throne of his glory. At that time the Apostles will be co-rulers with Jesus, and they will be administering the 12 tribes regathered in the land (see Matt. 19:28 and Luke 22:28-30). This coming new world order on earth is also called the *apokatastasis* — “putting everything back in order.”

Heaven, where Jesus is currently, must retain him there “until the *apokatastasis* of all things, about which the prophets spoke” (Acts 3:21; cp. Acts 1:6). None of this is remotely connected to the misleading popular idea about “going to heaven” when we die! Mary, even, is currently dead, sleeping the sleep of death, certainly not functioning as an intercessor! She will awake in the resurrection when Jesus comes back (1 Cor. 15:23; Dan. 12:2), and be part of the great Kingdom of God to be set up on a renewed earth (Dan. 2:44; 7:18, 22, 27, etc). Please read the following and be suitably shocked at the confirmation that “going to heaven” is not what the Bible promises:

“We must guard against a one-sided spiritualizing. Certainly the prophets **do not think of heaven**. Plows and pruning hooks have as little to do with heaven as swords and spears” (*Lange’s Commentary*).

“The records of our Lord’s life and teaching **do not speak of going to heaven**, as a modern believer so naturally does...Especially there is no suggestion that Jesus is offering his disciples heaven after this life (Strawson, *Jesus and the Future*, p. 38). Show this fact to all the pastors you know and everyone else! ✧

I’ve Got Your Back

by Barbara Buzzard

What a wonderful phrase this is! I hope it hasn’t and doesn’t become trite and overused, for it is a phrase spilling over with love and meaning. It is one of the most wonderful things that could be said to a person because it involves self-sacrifice, i.e. you would have to harm me before you could ever harm my friend. It dictates that careful watching and attention are being paid to the well-being of one’s friend. Inherent in this phrase is the idea that you step up when you are needed, no questions asked.

Along with the trend of 60 being the new 40, etc. I understand that we seem to be applauding new and different virtues in society today. Has the courage to stand up *for* our friends or to stand up *with* them and be counted gone by the wayside? Our new virtues are tolerance and acceptance and “not judging.” Courage has perhaps been replaced. But at what price? I have just finished a review of *Religious Literacy*¹ and the results are frightful, but it leaves me wondering about courage and those other virtues that are not measurable. I am not speaking of the courage which soldiers exhibit as they surely do, but of the sort of stuff which it takes to stand and be counted. “You can bet your life on...” is recognized in the military as the highest form of praise. And of course, the military principle of “bringing up the rear” is an “I’ve got your back” exercise.

¹ *Religious Literacy, What Every American Needs to Know – And Doesn’t*, Stephen Prothero, HarperCollins

I am speaking of the sort of love and loyalty that are so beautifully portrayed by David and Jonathan. It is said of Jonathan: “He loved David as he loved his own life” (1 Sam. 20:17). In our world of religious name-calling, cult labeling, and disparaging of non-orthodox beliefs, it would indeed take courage to stand with someone who is being slandered. As Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. stated so brilliantly: “In the end, we will remember not the words of our enemies, but the silence of our friends.” Scripturally we understand that our enemies may come from our inner circle: “And brother will deliver up brother to death, and a father his child; and children will rise up against parents, and cause them to be put to death” (Matt. 10:21), but where do our silent “friends” fit in? The “silence of friends” as Dr. King alluded to can be seen in a variety of ways: one who keeps his views and beliefs to himself when he knows that they would be unacceptable, a “mum’s the word” tactic to save one from embarrassment or recognition.

To Be Engraved into the Depths of Our Being

Yet another stunning gem from Dr. King: “Our lives begin to end the day we become silent about things that matter.” Silence about things that matter; I wish that this would be much more of a talking point than it is. Spare me the “new normal.” Silence is not affirmation; it is not loyalty; it is not strength; it is not *enough*. It is dangerous and it is dishonest, especially in the light of Psalm 139:3, which tells us that all our ways are scrutinized by the LORD. We are exhorted *never* to let loyalty escape from us but rather to engrave it into the depths of our being (Prov. 3:3). When we are silent about those things that matter, we are afraid — and fear is wrong.

Psalm 35:27 gives great commendation to the opposite, courageous camp: “But give great joy to those who have stood with me in my defense.” Also Esther’s remarkable example of great courage is highly acclaimed: “For if you remain silent at this time, relief and deliverance will arise for the Jews from another place and you and your father’s house will perish. And who knows whether you have not attained royalty for such a time as this?” (Esther 4:14). Her “if I perish, I perish” statement is surely “I’ve got your back.” (I will save you at the risk of my own life.) Tragically too often excuses are given for not speaking up: a reputation could be tarnished or a salary check canceled or a family member offended. Has Esther’s form of courage vanished? How dare we sing “Shine, Jesus, Shine” and hide out where we will not be detected for not toeing the party line? Are we not supposed to be the light, the lampstands, a reflection of his glory?

Mathematical Increase

There is a very interesting dynamic at work with reference to loyalty. And that is that it is easier for me to stand and be counted if I know that *you, my friend, my sister or brother in the faith*, are also standing. We take strength from one another and we give it as well, a sort of mathematical formula of multiplication of courage and steadfastness and determination. We ought not to discount this fundamental principle of strength in numbers, but it doesn't even take great numbers. Sometimes it only takes *one*. Could that *one* be you? What is our responsibility to one another?

Cain asked of God in an impertinent way (the gall!): "Am I my brother's keeper?" (Gen. 4:9). *Of course* he should have been his brother's keeper. Not only is the question arrogant, but dumb as well. "Biblical law expects a man's brother to be the first to assist him in time of trouble (Lev. 25:48)...His outright denial of responsibility shows he is much more hardened than the first human pair."² Cain's "Am I my brother's keeper?" is perhaps revealing of a poverty of spirit that helped to lead him into his dastardly action.

On the Shoulders of Giants

I believe that not understanding one's identity is a major cause for our laxity or blindness as to our responsibilities to our fellow believers and the unconverted world. We sing of standing on the shoulders of giants, but are we asking the question about what we owe to those giants and what responsibility we have for their sacrifices? Michael Servetus is credited for the freedom of speech which we enjoy and for an enormous impact on our Constitution, but his name is virtually unknown in the United States. He is one of those giants of the faith to whom great tribute should be given.³ His murder by Calvin has been greatly detailed in a recent work which sheds new evidence on this hate crime.⁴

Much is said in Scripture by Jesus about a reconfiguring of the family along spiritual lines rather than physical, e.g. Luke 8:21: "My mother and my brothers are those who hear the message of God and obey it." That of course makes the family, as defined by Scripture, much broader and our responsibilities even greater. This is a possible scenario: Mr. X in conversation with a pastor in his community was told in no uncertain terms that he was not a Christian, was not welcome in his church. The pastor further said that Mr. X was a heretic and that he wished evil to befall him. Mr. X said that this was one of the most painful, soul-crushing experiences in his life. Mr. X's friend and

fellow believer Mr. Y has *not* had this conversation with his pastor although he believes as Mr. X does. He happily attends a church of the same denomination where Mr. X was banned and denounced and anathematized. So, too, his friends, Mr. Q, R, S who all choose "not to make a fuss." What do we have here? At best, a house divided. At worst "friends" whose silence screams loudly, and a fractionated church where truth and unity in that truth are played down if not ignored. "Silence in the face of evil is itself evil: God will not hold us guiltless. Not to speak is to speak. Not to act is to act."⁵ Some say that it is perfectly possible to attend a congregation without that church knowing what one believes. Really?

I have been amazed and re-amazed when I heard individuals say that they either disliked their church or learned nothing from it. They went for social reasons only. Apparently this is OK since I hear it so often, but is it honest? Does your pastor know? If not, why not? Would this pattern change if your friends left? If you were publicly denounced? What would it take? Pardon my passion, but I cannot imagine Mary Dana⁶ or Queen Esther saying anything of the kind or even, "Yes, I know those teachings come from paganism but I don't really believe them; I just attend for the fellowship." How do you "have your brother's back"? Are you not flying/sailing under false colors?

This sort of silence is so alarming to me that I imagine two fictional scenarios: the one in hell, and again borrowing from Dr. Martin Luther King, "The hottest place in hell is reserved for those who remain neutral in times of great moral conflict." The other is at Judgment Day when we are in line and approaching our turn, we just hear "Next" and are passed over because our answer as to what we did to honor the Father and the Son was so feeble. Are we not all like the man who asked Jesus for time to bury his father (and it is not certain that the father was even dead yet, or even ill) in thinking, "I just need the ease/calm/fellowship/etc. that this situation provides." Jesus appears to take a more stringent view: "If you want to be my follower you must love me more than your own father and mother, wife and children, brother and sisters — yes, more than your own life. Otherwise you cannot be my disciple" (Luke 14:26). We hear much about redefining marriage. Have we redefined Proverbs 4:7 which says that "Getting wisdom is the most important thing you can do" and substituted "Getting fellowship...?"

⁵ Dietrich Bonhoeffer

⁶ Author of *Letters addressed to Relatives and Friends Chiefly in Reply to Arguments in Support of the Doctrine of the Trinity*, Boston, 1845, reprinted by CES, Indianapolis, Indiana, 1994

² *Word Biblical Commentary*, von Rad

³ *Out of the Flames*, Lawrence & Nancy Goldstone

⁴ *Did Calvin Murder Servetus?* Stanford Rives

There is, I think, a possible test that those of the above persuasion could use. It would be this: un-mute yourself within the church community. If one is allowed to speak the Truth and dialogue in love, then that sounds healthy. If not, if given “the left foot of fellowship” or asked not to speak, then what price a clean conscience? Here, I think, is the real key: *the true church is persecuted, but it never persecutes.*

Have We Exchanged Sincerity for Truth?

Considering the virtue of sincerity, which is much spoken about today: “Saul and others ‘verily thought’ that they were doing God service when they were ‘making havoc of the church’ by cruel persecutions, but did their sincerity turn their crime into a virtue?...Sincerity will not render harmless the believing of error any more than it will the drinking of poison. The modern theory of sincerity is not found in the Bible...And Paul did not preach to them that modern gospel of sincerity (which is a delusion and a snare), but faithfully declared to them ‘the gospel of the kingdom,’ as the Master commanded (Mat. 24:14, Acts 20:25).”⁷

I recently heard the “I’ve got your back” concept described as protective unity. I think that says it well. It was protective unity which Jesus prayed for in John 17:20; that his disciples enjoy the same unity which he had with his Father. We are only safe when we are one with Jesus, saying the same things as he did. Unity with Jesus will protect us from going wrong and it should be our aim and ambition to offer that hedge of protection to our fellow believers.

That very hedge of protection is offered to us by God (as long as we have aligned ourselves with Him). For anyone who has experienced betrayal — pain like none other, acute, intense, up close and personal, the same violation as in abuse cases — there is wonderful comfort here; God knew we would need it and He offers it in Exodus 23:12: “then I will be an enemy to your enemy and I will oppose those who oppose you.” I certainly need help in fighting my battles. I could have no better Helper! What a deal! What a covenant!

Guarantee of Powers

This principle is also understood internationally. This sort of alignment with one’s allies is known as a “guarantee of powers.” It is a sort of closing of the ranks, a tactic to put pressure on a nation which has stepped out of line to come into line again or face undesirable consequences from these super powers.

Uplift

In nature too, this principle is a most beautiful picture of how this dynamic works: we all know that geese fly in formation and that when the lead goose

tires, it rotates back in the formation and another takes its place as leader. But why the formation in the first place? Because as each bird flaps its wings, it creates an updraft for the bird immediately behind it, i.e. making it easier and allowing the bird to fly further. By flying in formation, the whole flock can fly 71% further than if each bird were to fly alone! If a goose were out of formation, it would feel the drag and resistance of the wind. It is easier *not* to go it alone. We can give each other protection *and* uplift.

The antithesis of loyalty is, of course, treachery, betrayal. The Psalms and Proverbs are so full of stories about betrayal, and they aim the sharpest possible rebukes at those who commit treacherous deeds. To commit treachery is to commit treason, a betrayal of one’s trust or faith. In the act of committing treachery against an individual, one becomes his enemy. And so begins the awful journey from friend to enemy. Scripture seems to be at its strongest with reference to crimes committed against a person: “Telling lies about others is as harmful as hitting them with an ax, wounding them with a sword, or shooting them with a sharp arrow” (Prov. 25:18). Or Proverbs 28:24: “Robbing your parents and then saying, ‘What’s wrong with that?’ is as serious as committing murder.”

Faithfulness is spoken of as a fruit of the spirit (Gal. 5:22), but is it not impossible to be faithful to our God and unfaithful or faithless toward a brother? “Many will say they are loyal friends, but who can find one who is really faithful?” (Prov. 20:6).

Let us recommit ourselves to that royal law of love that compels us to say to a brother, “I’ve got your back” and mean it.

In loving thanks to the Messiah Jesus, that second Adam who “had our backs” long before that expression was born. ✧

Getting into the Game: How the Christian Life Begins

It is wise for us all to revisit the very basics of the Christian faith. Confusion about how to become a Christian has been characteristic of much of church history, with competing denominations offering their various and often contradictory systems. The current presence of thousands of divided denominations is hardly a testimony to the one united church for which Jesus prayed “that they may be one as you [Father] and I are one” (John 17:11). Jesus’ half-brother Jude insists that we struggle hard for the one “faith once and for all delivered to the saints” (Jude 3).

There is a single process in the New Testament, providing us with instruction about how to become a Christian believer. That system has its origins in the teaching of Jesus. The master-teacher, as we know,

⁷ *The Gospel of the Kingdom*, Wiley Jones, 1879

explained the Christian system of initiation to Nicodemus. Jesus announced the first principles of salvation by saying: “Unless a person is born again, **born of the spirit** [regenerated], he cannot see or enter the Kingdom of God” (i.e. cannot be saved; see John 3:3, 5).

In Matthew, Mark and Luke Jesus carried out a relentless campaign in Israel to invite people to salvation by responding to his own Gospel of the Kingdom teaching (see Luke 4:43 for Jesus’ impressive faith and purpose statement). He urged his audiences to be saved by responding to his call to repentance and belief in the Gospel he preached. In Matthew, Mark and Luke this invitation to **life in the coming age** (vaguely translated as “eternal” or “everlasting” life) is presented in the parable of the sower and the seed. The essential seed is defined as the Gospel of the Kingdom of God (Matt. 13:19; Luke 8:11), linking it of course with Jesus’ parallel statement of the same truth about entering the Kingdom by being “born of the spirit,” as recorded by John 3:3, 5.

Fundamental to a correct understanding is a fact often overlooked. Jesus intended the same truth exactly by speaking of being **born again from the spirit** in order to enter the Kingdom (i.e. be saved, John 3), or being **generated by the word of the Gospel** of the Kingdom (Matt. 13:19). This is the one process by which the Christian “game” is entered.

The process is not that complex. It may be reduced to simple terms as the process of seeing, hearing, understanding, repenting and being forgiven (SHURF!). Lest we should miss this most basic of all biblical points, the process is repeated three times over in Matthew, Mark and Luke. Jesus is the sower sowing the seed Gospel of the Kingdom (Matt. 13:19). Some close their eyes and ears to the saving message. Others begin well and then get choked or stifled before arriving at the goal of the Kingdom and salvation. They “believe only for a while” (Luke 8:13). Others respond and with persistence produce the fruit of the spirit. The word of the Gospel is the vital germ creating new life in the believer. The process begins when the Kingdom Gospel is heard and understood (Acts 8:12). Then repentance and forgiveness follow. Mark 4:11-12 states this with particular clarity: Jesus says there that an intelligent reception of the word/Gospel/Message which he preached is the trigger of new life which leads to the Kingdom and salvation. As the Gospel unfolded in the ministry of Jesus, the later facts about his atoning death and resurrection became part of that same saving Gospel (see Matt. 16:21: “he began to speak of his death”).

In his conversation with the professional scholar Nicodemus, Jesus used the biological rather than the agricultural picture of a rebirth under the influence of **the spirit** as the essential key to becoming a Christian.

To farmers and fishermen by the lake Jesus described the same saving process as the reception of the life-imparting Gospel of the Kingdom, summarized as “**the word**.” The process is the same, described in different language.

Peter, who heard Jesus preach everywhere, reports the same saving theology as a **rebirth from the word** which is the Gospel of the Kingdom. In no case had Peter have heard Jesus talk about going to heaven when you die! Here is Peter’s critically important confirmation and repetition of Jesus’ theology of salvation, how to enter the Christian journey which leads to indestructible life, immortality in the coming Kingdom (see 2 Tim. 1:10). Peter said, “You have been **born again**, not from corruptible seed [*spora*] but incorruptible seed [cp. Jesus’ definition of the Gospel of the Kingdom as seed, Luke 8:11]...Flowers fade and wither, but that word of God endures forever. And that is the **word preached to you as Gospel**” (1 Pet. 1:23-25).

James described the very same entrance into the Christian faith. He said in effect: “By God’s will you have been born from the **word of the truth** implanted in you” (see James 1:18).

Paul described the same initiation into the Christian life as being “**born of the promise**” which he then called being “born of the spirit” (Gal. 4:28-29). Note carefully Paul’s theology of salvation which reproduces the very same words as Jesus to Nicodemus about being “born of the spirit” (John 3:5).

In Titus 3:5 Paul again alludes to Christian rebirth or regeneration, by receiving the gift of the holy spirit.

John in his epistle combines the same ideas as we find from Jesus’, James’ and Paul’s teaching about salvation when he speaks of having been born again from the seed (*sperma*, 1 John 3:9). John had been paying close attention to Jesus’ Gospel preaching of course. Christians are “born of God” or born through the seed (Luke 8:11). The vital seed is the Gospel of the Kingdom as Jesus and Paul always preached it.

The important fact to note is that Christian initiation is said to entail **rebirth from the spirit** and equally **rebirth from the word**. This simple fact proves that the word of the Gospel transmits spirit to those who hear and understand and assimilate the Gospel of the Kingdom. Jesus spoke of being born again of the spirit (John 3) and of rebirth from the seed of the Gospel word (in the parable of the sower in Matthew, Mark and Luke). Peter, as we saw, speaks of being **born of the word** which of course is identical with being **born again from the spirit**. There is a single process by which we become Christian believers and the saving Gospel is always to be traced back to the original Gospel preacher — Jesus himself. Note the importance of Hebrews 2:3: Salvation “was first announced by Jesus.”

This great truth is often totally lost in contemporary discussions of how to become a Christian.

The words of all prophets in the Bible are spirit-carrying words. Jesus said this beautifully as reported by John 6:63: “The words I have spoken to you are spirit and life.” The words, that is to say, carry the spirit, heart and mind of God, His creative energy. Hence Paul can refer to the saving **Gospel/word** as “energizing in you who believe” (1 Thess. 2:13). This is exactly the same as the parable of the sower, which makes the saving word of the Kingdom the source of all fruit. And fruit of course is **borne of the word/spirit**. Fruits of the spirit can come from no other Gospel message than the one proclaimed by Jesus (Mark 1:14-15; cp. Acts 8:12).

The disciples of course were the first believers in the Gospel as Jesus preached it and in Jesus as the promised Messiah, bearer of the Kingdom of God Gospel. They accepted the word of the Kingdom (Matt. 13:19) and were thus regenerated, starting the process of salvation. Christians are currently “being saved” (1 Cor. 15:2) They accepted the spirit-words of Jesus (John 6:63). They were empowered thus to go out and preach the Gospel. Gospel preaching in the New Testament is done by those who are under the influence of the spirit of God. The word and the spirit are inseparable. The Christian Gospel begins where Jesus began, with Mark 1:14-15, the Gospel as Jesus preached it, “God’s Gospel” concerning the Kingdom of God. ✧

Getting the Conversation Going about the Greatest Commandment of All

Here is the question to be asked gently of everyone:

“If you love me,” Jesus said, “you will keep my commandments.” OK then, will you please kindly tell me what is meant by the Great Commandment in Mark 12:29? What is Jesus’ (whom you claim to love) definition of the One God? Is that a unitary monotheistic or Trinitarian God affirmed by Jesus? Please just say. Thanks.

We would be interested in hearing any replies you receive!

Comments

“I recently repented of serving a false god (the Trinity) and now I’m having a problem — I’m the only one in the area who believes in the only true God (the Father) and in the true Jesus (Father’s Son and Messiah). I hope that God will open my friends’ eyes to see the truth!” — *Romania*

“I find myself with the weekend off and reading my newly arrived book of yours *Jesus Was Not a Trinitarian*. I just wished to express that I am thoroughly enjoying it and finding its contents disastrous to the

remaining roots of Trinitarian thought within me. I commenced the book in the chapter ‘If Only We Had Listened to Gabriel.’ I had completely missed the clear origin as explained by Gabriel in Luke 1:35 — shocking how one’s preconceived views make one’s eyes miss something so apparently obvious.” — *England*

“I know I am a stranger, but I just wanted to say thank you. I have been a lost soul (person) over the first 38 years of my life. I have accomplished much personally and professionally, but all of it as Solomon might say was ‘vanity’ for another fool to trash after I was gone. I bounced around churches (Catholic, Lutheran, Methodist) only to leave every time after I saw inconsistencies. Your resources along with others have given me hope/faith. I have found you and Dan Gill to be right on the money with teaching that is consistent; one where God is not a God of torment, not a God that would give us a Bible that we could not understand (which is what the other churches would preach when they had no answer – ‘You just have to have faith.’ Yes, but faith in what?). I just wanted to encourage you to keep up the good fight. Your words are not falling on deaf ears. (They are hitting someone’s over 900 miles away!)” — *Wisconsin*

“I just loved the Psalm 110:1 poem (January). I have actually written it down in the very front and last remaining free page in my Bible.” — *Australia*

“I do not think that many Christians choose to believe in the Trinity. It’s just a doctrine that all Christians embrace because everyone else believes in it. It’s a dangerous thing to believe that the masses are right because they are many. I wonder how many Christians in the world have stopped to ask themselves why they believe in the Trinity? The problem for me when I was taking my first steps as a Christian came when I found the Pentecostal church. I really believed that I had found the right church so I had too much faith in the people. But after some time I started to think about the Trinity. I was asking myself, Who is God? How can He be 3 but still be 1 God? But no one could explain it, and when they tried, it didn’t make any sense. One day a friend challenged me about the Trinity and I thought, ‘This guy is lost so I have to help him.’ Then he started to show me from the Bible why he believed that the Trinity was false and I was really shocked. I asked myself why I hadn’t seen this before. It was so clear. But the problem I think is that it’s easy to be tricked. It’s easy to think that you have the truth, and when you are so sure that you have the truth you get blind. And the other thing is that we have to build our faith on what the Bible is saying in many verses, not just one or two. We have to get the whole package, the big picture. If something sounds crazy and false, maybe it’s because it is crazy and false. If you really want to know the truth you will find the truth.” — *Sweden*

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