

The gospel of the Kingdom – Mark 1:1-14-15

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[What follows is the transcript of a sermon. It was initially intended to be heard, not read, so the tone is more conversational than academic. It has only been loosely edited, so forgive any grammatical, syntactical, or spelling errors. If you have questions, don't hesitate to get in touch with Pastor Derek at Derek.berry1990@gmail.com.

Take your copy of God's Word and meet me in Mark 1:1-15....

What exactly is the message of the gospel? In other words, what makes up the content of the gospel message? What is it that I must say for you to declare, "yes, that is the full gospel message." Believe it or not, this has been a hot topic within evangelicalism for the past thirty years. Allow me to briefly introduce two of the most dominant ways evangelicals have sought to define the gospel and its relation to the kingdom of God.

On one side, you have those who understand the Bible to teach that the beating heart of the gospel is Jesus' penal substitutionary atonement for us and our justification by faith alone. On the other side, you have those who wouldn't deny these doctrines, but to explain this as the central message is a truncation of the gospel. This view would present the beating heart of the gospel as the fact that God is renewing all things and will one day consummate his kingdom. I'm being a bit reductionistic due to time, but I believe I'm offering a brief and fair assessment. I'll show my hand by stating that I would subscribe to the former school of thought. But I also believe pitting these two ideas against one another is a fallacy. Prayerfully, by the end of this message, you'll see how the beating heart of the gospel is the work of Christ on the cross and our justification, while this doesn't take away from the beautiful truth that God is doing something incredible in this world that we will one day see completed when he rules in his consummated kingdom.

So, this morning we'll answer the questions,

1. What "gospel" was Jesus proclaiming?
2. Was it the same as Paul's gospel?
3. What time is fulfilled?
4. What is the kingdom of God?

So, let's dive in.

Mark begins these verses by updating us on John the Baptist's status. The word Mark uses for arrested is quite interesting. It literally means "handed over." The author employs this precise term three more times when referring to Jesus being handed over to the Romans for crucifixion. So, there's a bit of foreshadowing taking place here with John. If the forerunner of the Messiah is rejected and handed over, what will become of the Anointed one himself? So even when he's not attempting to, John's life points us to the ministry of the Lord Jesus.

Mark doesn't provide details behind John's arrest in these verses; however, they'll come later in this letter. For now, we know that John's ministry has officially ended, and Jesus has formally begun. The Lord Jesus brings something new that John merely alluded to in his ministry. John called for the people to repent in light of the coming of Christ and his new age. The Lord Jesus calls for repentance as he announces that it has come. What's still future for John in his ministry comes to fulfillment in the Lord Jesus. This is why he says this in Luke's gospel

¹⁶ "The Law and the Prophets were until John; since then the good news of the kingdom of God is preached, and everyone forces his way into it."

So now we have something new. Let's reread the rest of 14 and all of 15.

So, what is the kingdom? And what was Jesus preaching? Now for a quick precursor, some of you may find this a silly question. "Well, of course, Jesus asked people if they wanted to go to heaven when they died, and if they said yes, he would lead them in a prayer of salvation." Well, actually, no, that's not the case. Just consider this, his disciples didn't understand that he had to be delivered over to the Romans to die the death of a criminal for the sins of his people. Once he set his face towards Jerusalem and foretold his death, the Scriptures inform us that "they did not understand the saying and were afraid to ask." However, in Mark 6:7-13, he sends these same disciples out to preach in the towns. After instructing them, it says,

¹² So they went out and proclaimed that people should repent.

But if they didn't even understand that Jesus had to die for the sins of his people, what exactly were they preaching? Which leads to the more significant question, what was Jesus' message? What does it mean that he proclaimed the gospel that the kingdom of God was at hand? I'm glad you asked.

In order to adequately address this question, we first need to examine what the bible means here by the kingdom of God.

The phrase "Kingdom of God" or even the "Kingdom of Heaven" is a term unique to the New Testament. But the uniqueness of this term to the New Testament doesn't necessarily mean that the concept is foreign to the Old Testament. The prophets, in particular, are filled with an anticipation that God would one day deliver his people from oppression and shalom would fill the earth.

Technically, this concept of "kingdom" is used in two different ways in both the Old and New Testaments. There's a sense in which everyone is in the kingdom of God because he rules all! The parable of the weeds in Matthew's gospel is an excellent example of this.

⁴¹ The Son of Man will send his angels, and they will gather out of his kingdom all causes of sin and all law-breakers, ⁴² and throw them into the fiery furnace. In that place there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth. -Matthew 13:41-42

Jesus would also say that no bird falls from the sky without him having willed it; this is the same concept. So, the kingdom can describe God's sovereign rule over all things. And be not misguided; God does indeed rule sovereignly over all things at all times. Several passages in the Old Testament, including Psalms 97, 99, and 146, speak of God's current reign.

But this isn't the kingdom usage that we're going to focus on today. Instead, we'll spend our time on this eschatological kingdom that refers to the redemptive reign of God over His people. When you think kingdom biblically, don't think primarily of a geographical location that knights and kings must defend but think of "rule" or "reign." The kingdom is dynamic (about power) or relational (about humans' relationship to God, their king) instead of confined to a location. In other words, kingdom refers to the new order and society God establishes in which his rule will hold total sway.¹ Psalm 145 is one of the most explicit declarations of God's kingdom and one that will drive home our understanding of God's kingdom as his rule and reign.

They shall speak of the glory of your kingdom and tell of your power, -Psalm 145:11

A common feature in Hebrew poetry called parallelism is on full display in this passage. Here's a relatively simple definition of Hebrew parallelism.

"Hebrew poets would often state a thought two or more times but in different words, looking at the same concept from several different angles, like turning a diamond so that the light reflects through it in multiple ways. The benefit of that for us, beyond its wonderful devotional promise, is that it can help us see what the poets meant when they use difficult or obscure terms."²

In this text, the holy ones are said to "speak of the glory of his kingdom" and "tell of his power." But these two actions are the same. So, we see that his kingdom and power are paralleled. We see it again in verse 13.

Your kingdom is an everlasting kingdom, and your dominion endures throughout all generations.

Again, we see that the kingdom is paralleled with dominion. All of this to say, "kingdom" doesn't refer to a land or realm with borders, but rather his power, reign, and rule. This isn't to say that geography is irrelevant to the kingdom. God's kingdom over his people throughout the Bible is exercised in a specific geographic locale, but it isn't essential to the kingdom.

Zechariah 14:9 says, *And the Lord will become king over all the earth.*

¹ For recent discussion of the Kingdom of God as "reign or "realm" see the differing views of Marcus, "Entering into the Kingly Power of God," and O'Neill, "The Kingdom of God." The purely dynamic interpretation of the Kingdom as "reign" has been appealing to those who have been (quite rightly) unhappy with a simple identification of church and Kingdom; and yet the coming of the Kingdom in Jesus' teaching is associated with the gathering of a people and a "family" (e.g., Matt 12:46-50/Mark 3:31-35/Luke 8:19-21;) David Wenham, *Paul: Follower of Jesus or Founder of Christianity?* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1995) 35

² Kevin DeYoung & Greg Gilbert, *What is the Mission of the Church: Making Sense of Social Justice, Shalom, and the Great Commission* (Wheaton, Illinois: Crossway, 2011) 119

Also, Daniel 2:44 *And in the days of those kings the God of heaven will set up a kingdom that shall never be destroyed, nor shall the kingdom be left to another people. It shall break in pieces all these kingdoms and bring them to an end, and it shall stand forever...*

Getting even more specific, this kingdom is ruled by God's Anointed Son, King Jesus. And this makes perfect sense when you consider the story of the Old Testament. In 2 Samuel 7, God promised David his throne would be established forever. And the prophet Daniel envisions this "Son of Man" as the one who will rule and reign in this kingdom. So these Jews are very much aware of this concept of God's kingdom rule and reign based on these OT texts. And this was Jesus' message. The King who brings a better Kingdom, eschatological in nature, is finally here. Now repent and believe that you may live under the rule and reign of this king. And this is why there aren't multiple pathways to the kingdom. There's one entryway, which is through the King himself, the Lord Jesus because there's only one king. Perhaps you're here this morning, and one of the quibbles that you have with Christianity is the exclusivity of Jesus, especially in an age where inclusivity rules. Hopefully, this will help you understand why Christians hold to Jesus as the only way. He claims to be the king who rules the Kingdom to the glory of his Father, and we enter by faith through the Spirit's work. But you must first understand your spiritually impoverished states to enter his kingdom, which is his rule and reign, which will one day include the realm of the New Heavens and Earth. I encourage you to talk to me or any member to hear more about the gospel.

So hopefully, it's a bit clearer now what exactly Jesus was preaching. Now, let's consider two issues that may be burning your mind. One, it doesn't really seem like Jesus set up a kingdom. I mean, we still have pain, sickness, and death. And two, why did so many of his contemporaries reject him as the promised Messiah King? The answer to these two issues is related.

Inaugurated eschatology. Also known as already but not yet. The Bible teaches that God's kingdom has already broken into this world but has not yet been fully realized. So, in a sense, his kingdom is already here. And we saw this kingdom manifested in the ministry of Jesus. This is why he states that the kingdom of God is at hand here in this text.

But if it is by the Spirit of God that I cast out demons, then the kingdom of God has come upon you. -Matthew 12:28

I will give you the keys of the kingdom of heaven, and whatever you bind on earth shall be bound in heaven, and whatever you loose on earth shall be loosed in heaven." -Matthew 16:19

Matthew 18 clarifies that the kingdom's keys have been given to the church. So, the authority of that kingdom, the right to act in its name, is given in this age, by the King, to the church! More evidence that the kingdom is here and is manifested within the church. But there's also a "not yet" aspect of his kingdom. We await the day the kingdom is fully established in the New Heavens and New Earth. And those who'll reign with the King during this eternal kingdom have already entered by faith in the finished work of Jesus. So, we live in an overlap of ages, where the tension of this fallen age and the coming consummated kingdom age exist.

A failure to understand the already but not yet caused many Jews of Jesus' day to reject him. When the Jews read the prophecies in the Old Testament, they expected a hard break between this age and the age to come. Honestly, that's what it seems like when you read some of these passages.

For instance, take *Isaiah 9:6-7* as an example.

For to us a child is born, to us a son is given; and the government shall be upon his shoulder, and his name shall be called Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace. Of the increase of his government and of peace there will be no end, on the throne of David and over his kingdom, to establish it and to uphold it with justice and with righteousness from this time forth and forevermore. The zeal of the Lord of hosts will do this.

But God, in his wisdom, planned for the coming of the Messiah not just to be one event but two. He inaugurated in his first coming, giving a trailer of the coming consummation of the kingdom, which will be established at his second coming. That's one of the goals of his earthly ministry.

My kingdom will have no demonic activity, so watch me cast out demons.

My kingdom will have no false teaching or misrepresentations of God, so watch me rebuke false teachers and teach accurately.

My kingdom will have perfect leadership, so watch me perfectly lead my disciples.

My kingdom will have no death, so watch me raise the dead.

My kingdom will have no sickness or disease, so watch me heal the blind, deaf, mute, and diseased.

My kingdom will have no sin, so watch me hang on the cross for the sins of my people.

Do you get it? Jesus' ministry was meant to provide a foretaste of what is coming, the consummated kingdom in the New Heavens and Earth. And now, local churches are to continue that ministry by providing the world with a trailer of the coming kingdom. If there's one thing I hate, it's a misleading trailer. Godzilla is one example of this. This is why we have to take regenerate membership seriously. God has given us the keys to vote in those who confess the correct gospel with lives that match. And this is why church discipline is so important as well. We falsely teach the world that the eternal kingdom of heaven will be filled with nonbelievers when we don't protect regenerate membership. This is why our unity is so essential. Let's not teach the world that we're divided, lest they think heaven will be the same way.

So, we live in the in-between, already but not yet. Kevin DeYoung and Greg Gilbert, when discussing this issue, would say,

"Thus we enjoy the forgiveness of sin even as we struggle with it; thus, we enjoy the presence of the Spirit even as we may still grieve him; thus, we have been raised with Christ, seated at his right hand in the heavenly places, even as know we will, for a time, return to dust."

So, Jesus brought his kingdom at his first coming, and he'll bring it to its full realization at his second. Now to the next question.

Should this be the central message of the gospel? The fact that Jesus is King and that he's establishing his universal kingdom. Is the message of "man as a sinner, Jesus Christ as Savior, the response of faith and repentance" a truncation of the gospel? Do we rely too heavily on Paul the Apostle's writing to the neglect of the four gospel letters themselves? This has been the criticism of many, particularly in the socially conscious era that we live in today.

Now, I do believe there are a few indictments worthy of consideration before defending what I believe is a biblical view. The first indictment that this "kingdom view" (for the sake of this conversation) offers is that the more simplistic message of the cross fails to mention or explain this concept of the kingdom. I do believe this has some truth to it. In the many conversations I've had with believers of various demographics and ages, many are ignorant regarding the theme of the kingdom. So, I do believe we can do better in this area.

The second indictment claims that the simple message of the cross is very individualistic and therefore fails to acknowledge the universal world redeeming plan of God. I think there are merits to this grievance, although I wouldn't go as far as the proponents of this view would. But all too often, I've heard the term "my relationship with God is between him and me." No. Christianity is not just you and his relationship. When you're drawn unto him, you're placed into a people of God; This is a communal faith. And God will one day renew the heavens and the earth for the purpose of his glory and his people's enjoyment.

The third indictment with some merit is the fact that some are under the impression that Christianity is only about "getting to heaven." Yes, that's an element of salvation, but that's definitely not the end all be all. Many have said that this is what led colonizers in America and beyond to neglect the treatment of the individual's body and only have concern for the soul. This is indeed a distorted view of Christianity. You will not find this idea in the bible that the body is of no concern to the Lord. This is proto-Gnostic teaching at its finest.

Now I want to present what I believe this school of thought is missing, and then we'll look at Jesus' and Paul's message of the gospel properly harmonized. I believe this "kingdom" view pits Paul's and Jesus' understanding of the gospel against one another when we should instead seek to understand how the two are one. To be fair, they would claim that this is not what they are doing and that we read Jesus in light of Paul instead of the other way around. I'm saying I don't care where you start, I care about where you end. If we're not careful, we can end up with a canon within a canon. This means we elevate the red letters in the Bible against all of the other passages. This is perilous thinking. And yet, we hear people often say, "Did Jesus ever address...? (Fill in the blank). That was Paul who supports slavery, that's Paul who is misogynist and bigoted. Let's focus on only the red letters in the Bible, and we'll then promote true human flourishing." This view's proponents don't realize that they are saying they trust Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John's understanding of the gospel more than they do Paul's. Because remember, Jesus didn't write any Scripture himself. The Spirit of God inspired these Apostles, and associates of Apostles in Mark and Luke's case, to write down his Word. Therefore, we mustn't elevate certain portions of the text over, and against others, rather, we must set out to discover how they work together as one unit.

Also, this idea that we must utilize the term “kingdom” when preaching God’s Word based on the gospel writings totally depreciates the gospel of John. The term “eternal life” is actually the central theme and most utilized term in this late gospel writing. So, this idea that using the kingdom language to preach the gospel is a superior way of presenting this message is off base. And obviously, we also know this because Paul rarely used this term as well. But why? Why did Paul and John, in that manner, get away from using kingdom language as the central theme? Why were they more focused on justification and eternal life as the central themes? And do we have to choose between one or the other? Because when you pit these against one another, obviously, something tells you to pick the “Jesus’ approach” every time.

Well, there are a couple of points that we must consider. One, I believe the authorial intent of each gospel is for us to read it backward. So, we read all of Matthew in light of the cross, we read all of Mark in light of the cross, we read all of Luke in light of the cross, and we read all of John in light of the cross. This is very similar to our understanding of the Old Testament. We read the Hebrew Bible in light of the revelation that is to come in the Lord Jesus Christ. Similarly, we don’t read the Sermon on the Mount as just good ethics apart from his finished work. Consider Matthew 5:3 *“Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven. The cross gives us the proper understanding we need for this passage to sink in truly.*

How about Matthew 6:14? *For if you forgive others their trespasses, your heavenly Father will also forgive you, but if you do not forgive others their trespasses, neither will your Father forgive your trespasses.*

Without the cross, you’re left with works-based righteousness. Lastly, Matthew 7:21 *“Not everyone who says to me, ‘Lord, Lord,’ will enter the kingdom of heaven, but the one who does the will of my Father who is in heaven.* What is the will of the Father? To believe in the crucified savior!

So that’s the first point. I want to quote our friend John Piper in the second.

“Why would we expect that the Lord Jesus in coming into the world to die, that his preparatory talking before the performance of salvation would somehow be anywhere near as normative of the nature of the salvation as what follows? In other words, it seems to me it’s inherently to be expected that before salvation is to be performed at Good Friday and Easter, one would speak of salvation a bit differently than after it had been performed, and now all could be seen in the light of the performance of why he came, and therefore the post discussion of it authoritatively would be different, that’s what we would expect. So why would we elevate the preperformance articulation of salvation to the post-performance articulation of salvation?”³

Does that make sense? So, it’s not that Jesus and Paul are preaching different gospels, there are indeed different emphases, but I would argue that this is the natural expectation considering the pre and post-cross preaching. Now, I don’t have time this morning to get into it, but in his work, David Wenham goes through the Scriptures and shows how much of Paul’s theology is founded

³John Piper, (March 23, 2014) Panel Discussion *Did Jesus Preach the Gospel?*
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=3Ss5CdnTBao>

in the teachings of Jesus, just with different terms and phrases employed by the Apostle. If this subject interests you, I encourage you to purchase this book.

Now, this is not to say that Paul NEVER mentions the term kingdom, he absolutely does. But there is a disparity between the frequency of use between Jesus and Paul. Piper answers why he believes there is this great disproportion between the two. I find this incredibly helpful.

“Jesus intentionally did not preach Jesus as explicitly as Paul preaches Jesus. In fact, he hid Jesus, they didn't have a clue what real Messiah was and what real Kingdom was. So, Jesus was gradually reinterpreting Messiah, reinterpreting Kingdom and he winds up stretched out on the cross as king. He reached his goal in dying for his people. So, Jesus is gradually deconstructing and reinterpreting kingdom, and concealing himself temporarily until he does his work. And Paul comes along and preaches Christ as Lord. So, in my understanding, Paul perfectly understood what Jesus was doing in reinterpreting kingdom- making himself ready to be the crucified, truly-understood Messiah King. And now I don't preach that kingdom anymore as often; I preach Christ the king, and kingdom is brought in subordinately. So, Jesus foregrounds it and reinterprets it; Paul backgrounds it and puts the king Jesus in the foreground which is just what Jesus would want him to do and would make sense of what he should do.”⁴

That's good! So, Jesus didn't mean for Paul to mimic his phraseology which was being formulated carefully to get him to the cross by a people who were trying to make him king only because he fed their belly. After his resurrection, he informs his disciples of what the central message should be.

⁴⁵ Then he opened their minds to understand the Scriptures,⁴⁶ and said to them, “Thus it is written, that the Christ should suffer and on the third day rise from the dead,⁴⁷ and that repentance for^[c] the forgiveness of sins should be proclaimed in his name to all nations, beginning from Jerusalem.-Luke 24:46-47

Greg Gilbert provides some helpful terms when it comes to this conversation. There appear to be two groups of people. Those who believe the gospel is the good news that God is reconciling sinners to himself through the death and resurrection of Jesus, let's call them zoom-lens people. And then those who say the gospel is the good news that God will renew and remake the world through Christ, let's call them wide-angle people. To a zoom-lens person, the question, “What is the gospel?” translates as, “What is the message a person must believe to be saved?” To a wide-angle person, the question “What is the gospel?” translates instead to “What is the whole good news of Christianity?” So, of course, he expounds. Neither is more biblical than the other, as a matter of fact, the Bible asks both questions. “What must a person do to be saved?” and “What is the good news of Christianity?” And it answers both using the term gospel.⁵ So, let's put it all together. What may be helpful is referring to the broad sense as “the gospel of the kingdom” and the narrow sense as the “gospel of the cross.” But here are some points that you have to remember.

⁴ IBID

⁵ Wide-angle lens-Matthew 4:23, Luke 4:18-19, Acts 13:32-33. Zoom-lens-Acts 10:36-43, Romans 1:16-17, 1 Corinthians 15:1-5, 1 Corinthians 1:17-18.

First, there is only one gospel. The New Testament authors have no problem zooming in and out on that one message, but there is only one gospel. Second, the gospel of the kingdom necessarily includes the gospel of the cross. You cannot preach a full gospel if you leave out the message of the cross, as some have. Thus, it is wrong to say the gospel is the declaration that the kingdom of God has come. This is a cross-less message, therefore not the gospel. But this isn't the case in reverse. You can preach a full gospel without mentioning all of the elements of the kingdom. Prayerfully that has been proven by now. Third, the gospel of the cross is the fountainhead of the gospel of the kingdom. Fourth, it's wrong to say the message of the cross is a truncation of the gospel. You would have to indict the New Testament authors themselves.

So yes, Jesus is King is a great truth! But it's only great when we understand what a king does. Even his death is uniquely king-like work. Therefore, the truth that Jesus is king detached from his death on the cross is incomplete. In the Old Testament, the responsibilities of the king were both representation and suffering. We see this in the life of David. What he did, Israel did. His acts had ramifications for their lives because he represented them. Consider 1 Chronicles 21:3, 7. Joab is pleading with David not to take a census of the people. He asks him: "Why then should my lord require this? Why should it be a cause of guilt for Israel?" But the king's word prevailed against Joab. . . But God was displeased with this thing, and he struck Israel." Did you notice what happened? The king acted, the king sinned, and the nation suffered the consequences. But also, to be the king meant you would suffer. Consider the life of David since the day he was anointed as king. His life was never marked by ease but rather by adversity and sorrow. In the book of Psalms, especially in book 2, you read of David crying out in distress and pain not only as an individual but as the nation's voice. He represented them in his suffering.⁶

In King Jesus, we have one who represents his people with his sinless life and who suffers for his people on the cross. This is why we must present the cross and resurrection as the central aspect of the gospel. It is this good news that Paul boldly proclaims while in Rome. What a mighty King, God, and Savior we serve, in the Lord Jesus Christ.

Let's pray.

⁶ Concepts drawn from <https://www.9marks.org/article/a-t4g-2020-sermon-what-is-and-isnt-the-gospel/>