

THE
IRRESISTIBLE
KINGDOM

*God's Marvelous Purpose for All Things
And its Unavoidable Fulfillment*

CHIP BROGDEN



THE SCHOOL OF CHRIST

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The Irresistible Kingdom

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The Gospel of the Kingdom



"And Jesus went about all Galilee, teaching in their synagogues, and preaching the Gospel of the Kingdom, and healing all manner of sickness and all manner of disease among the people." (Matthew 4:23)

What is the Gospel? The word *gospel* means "Good News." In modern parlance, it is the message of salvation – what you need to do in order to go to heaven after you die. The Good News, as most understand it today, is how to be saved, or "Born Again;" how to become a believer, a Christian. The preaching of the Gospel consists of telling people that in order to be saved they must accept Jesus Christ as their personal Savior. This brings the promise of eternal life in heaven with God after the believer dies. For some, the Good News goes even further, and their Gospel message includes God's provision for power, health, prosperity, and success for those who learn how to exercise their faith.

Of course, if you do not "pray the Sinner's Prayer," if you do not accept Jesus as your personal savior, then this Good News becomes Bad News; your eternal destiny is to burn in hell along with all the other unbelievers.

But this summary of "the Gospel" gives rise to several questions that beg to be answered. We hear what is preached and proclaimed today as "the Gospel." But is *this* the Gospel that Jesus preached? Is *this* the Gospel that the apostles

preached? Is *this* what the early Ekklesia¹ understood the Gospel to be? Was the Gospel, to them, anything more than the issue of heaven and hell?

Is it possible that some two thousand years after Jesus began to share His Good News we have missed the point? Is it possible that we have added to the original message? Is it possible that we have subtracted from the original message? If we have missed the point, and the Gospel we preach is somehow faulty, or lacking something, would this not explain the lack of faith, and power, and holiness among many professing Christians today?

What if we could go back to the Scriptures and discover the real meaning behind everything – the true message of the Gospel, the whole counsel of God, the ultimate purpose and thought and intention behind everything God has done, is doing, and will do?

The purpose of this book is to do that very thing. When we really look at what the Bible says and grasp the implications of the Gospel according to Jesus then we soon discover that this Good News is better than we could have ever dared to hope. It is a story of recovering something that was once thought to be totally lost, redeeming something that was once thought to be absolutely hopeless. It is a story of God bringing something wonderfully good out of something terribly evil. It is a story of God bringing life and light out of so much death and darkness. It is a story of love, and the incredible lengths to which that love will go to secure the object of its affection.

¹ In this book the word *Church* will always be used in reference to the visible structure of the Christian religious system, and will never be used in any spiritual context. The term *Ekklesia* is used to describe the invisible spiritual fellowship of all disciples of Jesus, both universally and locally. Please see the author's preface for an explanation of why this is necessary. *The Ekklesia* will be elaborated upon in Chapters 8 and 9.

The Gospel is more, so much more, than how to avoid hell and go to heaven; it is the story of an Idea, a Purpose, an Intention, a Plan, which is working itself out in this universe even as you sit here reading these words.

This Ultimate Purpose can be summed up into a single thought, a central idea, that you find weaving its way throughout the Bible and throughout human history. It is the theme of Jesus, the preaching of the apostles, and the understanding with which those first believers became followers of Christ. And this understanding of God's Ultimate Purpose and Intention finds expression in something that the Bible refers to as *The Kingdom of God*.²

At the center of this Kingdom of God is a Person. Everything that God has done, is doing, and will do is centered around this Person. The Bible says that all things come from Him, through Him, and unto Him.³ This Person is the Lord Jesus Christ.

It is God's Will that the King and His Kingdom fill all things with His Light, His Love, and His Life; and so this Kingdom is constantly growing, expanding, and increasing. There are elements in this universe that try to resist this increasing. Although they can delay or hinder the Kingdom, they cannot stop its increase.

A Kingdom That Fills the Earth

² A comparison of the terms "Kingdom of Heaven" and "Kingdom of God" shows that what Matthew called the "Kingdom of Heaven" the other Gospel writers called the "Kingdom of God." Since the same parables used to describe Matthew's "Kingdom of Heaven" are also used to describe Mark and Luke's "Kingdom of God", there is no Scriptural basis for teaching that these are two separate ideas. For the most obvious example, compare Matthew 13 with Mark 4 and Luke 8.

³ Rom. 11:36

As we find out what the Bible has to say about this Person, and the Kingdom that surrounds Him, we will come to the conclusion that this is an *Irresistible Kingdom*. For example, the Book of Daniel provides us with remarkable insight into this irresistible Kingdom of God:

You watched as a stone was cut out without hands, which struck the statue upon its feet that were of iron and clay, and broke them to pieces. Then was the iron, the clay, the brass, the silver, and the gold, broken to pieces together, and became like the chaff of the summer threshing floors; and the wind carried them away, that no place was found for them: and the stone that broke the image became a great mountain, and filled the whole earth... And in the days of these kings shall the God of Heaven set up a Kingdom, which shall never be destroyed: and the Kingdom shall not be left to other people, but it shall break in pieces and consume all these kingdoms, and it shall stand for ever. (Dan. 2:34,35,44)

The rise and fall of the major world powers were described as a great statue made of different materials. The head of gold represented the Babylonian empire. The chest and arms of silver represented the Persian empire. The belly and thighs of brass represented the Grecian empire. The legs of iron and the feet of iron and clay represented the Roman empire. This information is so well known and documented that Bible scholars and historians simply take it for granted.

But the true significance of this statue is not that it provides us with a prophetic declaration of the rise and fall of earthly powers. After all these kingdoms comes another Kingdom. This Kingdom is what we want to focus our attention on, for this Kingdom is very different from the others. Whereas those other kingdoms arose one after another and added something of their own to the statue, this final Kingdom comes *from the outside* and destroys the statue. We see that this particular Kingdom is unique in that

it has nothing to do with the statue at all. It is a Stone; and not just any old stone, but a Stone "made without hands."

Even more fascinating is how this Kingdom interacts with the other kingdoms. First it completely and totally destroys the statue and scatters its pieces so completely that there is "no place" found for them. Next, this Stone becomes a great mountain, and eventually, this Stone which destroyed the statue and became a mountain *fills the whole earth*.

The simple explanation is that God will establish an Irresistible Kingdom on the earth. This Kingdom does not rise up from the earth, but it comes down from heaven. This Kingdom will break to pieces and consume all the other kingdoms. And this Kingdom will increase from a single stone into a great mountain that fills the entire earth. It is an Irresistible Kingdom! Not only can this Kingdom not be stopped, but when people see the King for Who He really is, they no longer desire to resist Him. This is why the Irresistible Kingdom continues to grow and expand, so that eventually the King and His Kingdom "fill all things."⁴

The Gospel According to Jesus

The idea of a Kingdom to come was an inherently Jewish hope for hundreds of years. This Kingdom (according to the prophets) would be ruled by a deliverer and savior of the people, who would restore Israel to its rightful place of ascendancy among the nations of the world. This ruler was known as the Messiah.

Finally, after so many centuries of waiting, the Messiah arrived. Of course they did not realize that He was the Messiah, and so they could not fully appreciate the

⁴ Eph. 1:23; 4:10

significance of His ministry. For our part we can look to the record of Scripture and see what manner of Man He was.

Of particular interest would be the first thing He said. The Son of God lived in relative obscurity for the first thirty of His thirty-three years on earth, waiting for the right time. Finally the time came, and He began to preach His Good News. We are thankful that He came bearing Good News, Glad Tidings, instead of Bad News! Given the state of things in which He found Himself in, the fact that He brought Good News is amazing in and of itself.

So what was this Good News? Specifically, when Jesus finally began to preach at the age of thirty, what was His theme? Salvation? Health and wealth? The need for revival? A scholarly dissertation from the Hebrew Scriptures? A declaration of Himself as the Son of God, and a demand that all Israel recognize Him as such? We do not have to speculate as to the substance of the beginning of His preaching:

- From that time on, Jesus began to preach, and to say, "Repent: for the Kingdom of Heaven is at hand." (Mt. 4:17)
- Now after that John was put into prison, Jesus came into Galilee, preaching the Gospel of the Kingdom of God, and saying, "The time is fulfilled, and the Kingdom of God is at hand: repent ye, and believe the Gospel." (Mk. 1:14,15)
- And [Jesus] said unto them, "I must preach the Kingdom of God to other cities also: for therefore am I sent." (Lk. 4:43)

Thus began the mission and message of Jesus, with the Kingdom of God as the fundamental theme.

The Beatitudes: A Manifesto for the Irresistible Kingdom

And seeing the multitudes, [Jesus] went up on a mountain, and when He was seated, His disciples came to Him. Then He opened His mouth and taught them, saying... (Mt. 5:1,2)

In time, Jesus would get more specific about the true nature and character of His Kingdom. The Book of Matthew has been called the Book of the King and His Kingdom with good cause. Matthew documented more about the Kingdom of God than all the other Gospel writers put together. The bulk of the Kingdom parables and teachings are gathered together in Matthew. It is no coincidence that the Book of Matthew is the first book in the New Testament, and that Matthew's Gospel is presented before the other three Gospels. No doubt the Holy Spirit had a hand in arranging the order of our New Testament. The message is that *the King and His Kingdom are foundational to everything that follows after.*

The first recorded in-depth teaching of Christ is found in Matthew and is commonly referred to as the Sermon on the Mount. It is the earliest documentation we have of the essence of Jesus' teachings. Not surprisingly, the Kingdom of God is referred to consistently and frequently. In fact, the first statement made gives reference to the Kingdom: "Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the Kingdom of Heaven."⁵ Almost immediately following this Kingdom beatitude comes another one: "Blessed are they which are persecuted for righteousness' sake: for theirs is the Kingdom of Heaven."⁶

In this relatively short "sermon" from the Book of Matthew, chapters 5-7, much can be gleaned concerning this

⁵ Mt. 5:3

⁶ Mt. 5:10

Irresistible Kingdom. Some things we rather expect, while other things are quite disturbing. There is some manner of *order* in this Kingdom, with some considered "great" and some considered "least" (5:19). One may *enter* the Kingdom only with a true righteousness; hypocrites are not allowed (5:20). We are to *pray daily* for the Kingdom to come and the Will of God to be done "on earth, as it is in Heaven," and acknowledge that the Kingdom, the power, and the glory belong to God (6:10,13). We are to *seek first* the Kingdom of God (6:33). Most troubling is the assertion that merely *calling* Jesus "Lord, Lord" is not enough to enter the Kingdom; actually *doing* the will of God is a necessary requirement (7:21).

These are the direct references to the Kingdom; the overall sense of the Sermon on the Mount was that a new order of things had arrived. The law of Moses, contained within the Old Covenant, primarily focused on the outward behavior; in this Kingdom of God, *inward purity* carried more weight. Jesus showed that scrupulous observance of religious things neither was, nor is, the point; character, moral authority, and spiritual maturity is what God is really after.⁷ "That you may be the children of your Father which is in heaven"⁸ means more than being able to trace your earthly lineage back to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, for John the Baptist declared that, "God can raise up children for Abraham out of these stones."⁹ Having God for your Father meant actually bearing some resemblance to Him in word, in character, in deed, in spiritual constitution. It was something more than possessing His written commandments, it was

⁷ Indeed, the Old Testament command that "You shall love the Lord your God with all your *heart*, soul, and might" (Deut. 6:5) shows that even in the midst of so much Jewish ritual God was (and still is) concerned for the heart.

⁸ Mt. 5:45

⁹ Lk. 3:8b

being recognized as having something of His Own Light, Life, and Love; His very nature.

The Irresistible Kingdom Parables

A study of the teachings of Jesus reveals that His primary theme was the Kingdom of God.¹⁰ Jesus constantly used parables (short, allegorical stories) to illustrate His Kingdom. Here is a sampling from the Book of Matthew only:

- The Kingdom of Heaven is like a man which sowed good seed in his field... (Mt. 13:24)
- The Kingdom of Heaven is like a grain of mustard seed... (Mt. 13:31)
- The Kingdom of Heaven is like leaven... (Mt. 13:33)
- The Kingdom of Heaven is like treasure hid in a field... (Mt. 13:44)
- The Kingdom of Heaven is like a merchant man, seeking goodly pearls... (Mt. 13:45)
- The Kingdom of Heaven is like a net, that was cast into the sea... (Mt. 13:47)
- The Kingdom of Heaven is like a man that is a householder... (Mt. 13:52)

¹⁰ Based upon the fact that the Kingdom of God / Kingdom of Heaven is the stated theme of Jesus' preaching, or is specifically referenced by Him while teaching, approximately 106 times in the Gospels. By way of an interesting comparison, Jesus discussed "love" (loving God, loving your neighbor, loving your enemies, or lack of love) approximately 40 times, while "salvation" and "saved" are alluded to only 15 times.

- The Kingdom of Heaven is like a certain king, which would take account of his servants... (Mt. 18:23)
- The Kingdom of Heaven is like a certain king, which made a marriage for his son... (Mt. 22:2)
- Then shall the Kingdom of Heaven be like ten virgins... (Mt. 25:1)
- For the Kingdom of Heaven is as a man travelling into a far country... (Mt. 25:14)

The parables are not quaint little stories; they are prophetic declarations of spiritual truth, and they give us invaluable insight into this Irresistible Kingdom.¹¹ Concealing the truth within the context of a parable was necessary, Jesus said, "Because it is given unto you [the disciples] to know the mysteries of the kingdom of heaven, but to them [the rest of the people] it is not given."¹² Those who want to understand the mysteries of the *Kingdom* have to have a relationship with the *King*. The mysteries of the Kingdom are reserved, not for passive listeners, but for true followers: so "when they were alone, He expounded all things to His disciples."¹³

Disciples of the Irresistible Kingdom

Of course, this Kingdom is *of* God, and *from* God. But one astounding aspect of this Kingdom is that the King is willing to *share* His Kingdom with His people. In a very real sense, it

¹¹ An in-depth analysis of the parables of Jesus is beyond the scope of this book; however, they are so critical to our understanding of the Kingdom of God that we plan to expound upon them individually in a subsequent publication.

¹² Mt. 13:11

¹³ Mk. 4:34

is *our* Kingdom - belonging to Christ and belonging to us. The implications are staggering:

- Blessed are the poor in spirit: for *theirs* is the Kingdom of Heaven. (Mt. 5:3)
- Blessed are they which are persecuted for righteousness' sake: for *theirs* is the Kingdom of Heaven. (Mt. 5:10)
- And I will give *unto you* the keys of the Kingdom of Heaven... (Mt. 16:19a)
- Then shall the King say unto them on His right hand, "Come, you who are blessed of My Father, inherit the Kingdom *prepared for you* from the foundation of the world..." (Mt. 25:34)
- Fear not, little flock; for it is your Father's good pleasure to *give you* the Kingdom. (Lk. 12:32)
- And I *appoint unto you* a Kingdom, as My Father has appointed unto Me. (Lk. 22:29)
- Do you not know that *the saints shall judge the world?* and if the world shall be judged by you, are you unworthy to judge the smallest matters? (1 Cor. 6:2)
- But you are... a *royal* priesthood. (1 Pet. 2:9ff)
- To him that overcomes will I grant to *sit with Me in My throne*, even as I also overcame, and am set down with My Father in His throne. (Rev. 3:21)
- [The Lamb, Christ] *has made us* unto our God kings and priests: and *we shall reign* on the earth. (Rev. 5:10)

When viewed from the perspective of the Irresistible Kingdom, it seems obvious that discipleship is partly a training program for governing together with Christ in a future age. Far from being passive spectators, disciples are

called to be active participants in this Kingdom. If we do not learn our lessons *here* then we will miss out on something *there*.

As their training progressed, Jesus gave specific instructions to His disciples about the focus of their ministry. What were they supposed to talk about when they went forth? Was their Gospel message different from Jesus' message, or was it an extension of the original message?

It is apparent that the disciples were commissioned to go forth as ambassadors, representing the same Kingdom that Jesus Himself declared. In addition to praying daily for the Kingdom to come, the disciples were instructed to actually *make known* the coming of the Kingdom, and *demonstrate proof* of its coming. The evidence that the Kingdom was near was given in a very straightforward, practical manner: "Heal the sick, cleanse the lepers, raise the dead, cast out devils."¹⁴ The sending forth was always done under the auspices of announcing a Kingdom.

- And as you go, preach, saying, *The Kingdom of Heaven is at hand*. (Mt. 10:7)
- And He sent them *to preach the Kingdom of God*, and to heal the sick. (Lk. 9:2)
- And heal the sick that are therein, and say unto them, *The Kingdom of God is come near to you*. (Lk 10:9)

No doubt there were many who heard this message and, seeing the accompanying signs and wonders, began to think of joining the disciples. Jesus used the idea of a Kingdom to challenge those who wavered:

¹⁴ Mt. 10:8

And [Jesus] said to another, "Follow Me." But he said, "Lord, suffer me first to go and bury my father." Jesus said unto him, "Let the dead bury their dead: but *you go and preach the Kingdom of God.*" And another also said, "Lord, I will follow You; but let me first go bid them farewell, which are at home at my house. " And Jesus said to him, "No man, having put his hand to the plough, and looking back, is *fit for the Kingdom of God.*" (Lk. 9:59-62)

The King Rejected, Murdered, and Raised

Alas, in spite of all the miracles and teachings about the Irresistible Kingdom, the King was despised and rejected. A city that welcomed Him on *their* terms would quickly reject Him when He presented them with *His* terms.¹⁵ A nervous Pilate interrogated his subject thoroughly: "Are You the King of the Jews? Are You a King?"¹⁶ Jesus confirmed that He is indeed a King, but declared that His Kingdom is not of this world.¹⁷

How ironic that the thief crucified next to Jesus was able to perceive what others could not, and said, "Lord, remember me when You come into Your Kingdom."¹⁸ This simple acknowledgement was enough to secure from Jesus the promise of being with Him in Paradise.¹⁹

After the resurrection of Jesus, He did not immediately return to heaven. Instead, He remained forty more days on the earth, spending time with His disciples. Now consider: He *began* His earthly ministry preaching the Gospel of the

¹⁵ See Mk. 11:10. Jerusalem received Jesus with shouts that the kingdom had come. When this failed to happen *as expected* the same crowds who shouted "Hosanna!" would soon cry "Crucify Him!"

¹⁶ Jn. 18:33,37

¹⁷ Jn.18:36

¹⁸ Lk. 23:42

¹⁹ Lk. 23:43

Kingdom. The Kingdom was the core of His teachings *during* His brief ministry of three and a half years. How do you think He would *end* His season on the earth?

There were certainly many things that the disciples needed (or wanted) to know. With the realization that Jesus was leaving them to go to the Father, the disciples would have been understandably concerned. What do we do now? How do we go about this? Where do we begin? There were many questions, to be sure. Jesus might have taught them how to plant, organize and govern churches, or how to raise support for their missionary journeys. But the Teacher continued to teach along the same lines as always, and essentially re-aligned them back to their original message:

[Jesus] showed Himself alive after His suffering by many infallible proofs, being seen of them forty days, and *speaking of things pertaining to the Kingdom of God*. (Acts 1:3)

And so we see a consistent theme. From beginning to end, right up until His ascension, the passionate subject of Jesus Christ was *the Kingdom of God*.

When Jesus finally did send them forth to "go into all the world and preach the *Gospel* to every creature"²⁰ this was not a strange new thing for which they were unprepared. They understood (better than ever before) what the *Gospel* was because Jesus had already given them their mission long before He sent them forth. It was not just preaching something in a general sort of way and calling it the "Gospel." It was a Kingdom Gospel: "This *Gospel of the Kingdom* shall be preached in all the world for a witness unto all nations; and then shall the end come."²¹

²⁰ Mk. 16:15

²¹ Mt. 24:14

The Early Christians and the Irresistible Kingdom

Did the disciples learn these lessons? Were they able to pass them on to others? We find the answers in the Book of Acts and in the letters those disciples (now called apostles) wrote to young assemblies of believers. The apparent lack of explicit references to "the Kingdom" is understandable, given that the Roman government took a dim view of anyone spreading messages about any king other than Caesar, or any kingdom other than Rome's (particularly in the tumultuous land of Palestine). But the evidence is there nonetheless, and it is clear that they continued to teach and preach what Jesus taught and preached - the Kingdom of God.

- When they believed Philip *preaching the things concerning the Kingdom of God*, and the name of Jesus Christ, they were baptized, both men and women. (Acts 8:12)
- Confirming the souls of the disciples, and exhorting them to continue in the faith, and that we must through much tribulation *enter the Kingdom of God*. (Acts 14:22)
- And [Paul] went into the synagogue, and spoke boldly for the space of three months, disputing and persuading *the things concerning the Kingdom of God* (Acts 19:8).
- And now behold, I know that ye all, among who *I have gone preaching the Kingdom of God*, shall see my face no more. (Acts 20:25)
- "...there came many to [Paul] into his lodging; to whom *he expounded and testified the Kingdom of God, persuading them concerning Jesus*, both out of the law of Moses, and out of the prophets, from morning til evening. (Acts 28:23)
- *Preaching the Kingdom of God, and teaching those things which concern the Lord Jesus Christ*, with all confidence, no man forbidding him. (Acts 28:31)

As we move through the New Testament and delve into the apostolic teachings and letters written to the young Ekklesias of Christ, we find the Kingdom of God is the underlying theme that gives hope, courage, power for living a holy life, and strength to keep pressing on. The idea of an *inheritance* is used quite frequently, and the understanding was that they had *only just begun* to taste something that would be theirs in fullness at some point in the future - provided they lived a life *worthy* of that inheritance. The presence of the Holy Spirit in the disciple of Jesus was considered an "earnest of the inheritance;"²² that is to say, a *deposit*, or an *advance* drawn upon that future inheritance and given to the heirs as proof of something greater that is currently held *in trust* for them until they come of age.

This gives some context for the subsequent instructions regarding the conduct of those who claim to be followers of Christ. The Inheritance is an indirect reference to the Kingdom, also described as a *reward*. Jesus taught, and the apostles later confirmed, that this Inheritance could be *lost* through conduct unbecoming of an heir.²³ The promises were conditioned upon a life that reflected obedience to the King *in advance* of the final revealing of His Kingdom. In other words, *character*, not pedigree, would be the determining factor.

Consider the following examples:

- And now, brethren, I commend you to God, and to the word of His grace, which is able to build you up, and to give you an *inheritance* among all them which are sanctified. (Acts 20:32)

²² 2 Cor. 1:22; 5:5; Eph. 1:14

²³ Unfaithful stewards; wicked, lazy, unprofitable servants; foolish virgins; unfruitful fruit trees; all these are parabolic examples of this loss.

- To open their eyes, and to turn them from darkness to light, and from the power of satan unto God, that they may receive forgiveness of sins, and *inheritance* among them which are sanctified by faith that is in Me. (Acts 26:18)
- And if children, then *heirs*; heirs of God, and *joint-heirs with Christ*; if so be that we suffer with Him, that we may be also *glorified together*. (Rom. 8:17)
- Know you not that the unrighteous *shall not inherit* the Kingdom of God? (1 Cor. 6:9)
- And if you be Christ's, then you are Abraham's seed, and *heirs according to the promise*. (Gal. 3:29)
- Wherefore you are no more a servant, but a *son*; and if a son, then an *heir* of God through Christ. (Gal. 4:7)
- Envyings, murders, drunkenness, revellings, and such like: of which I tell you before, as I have also told you in time past, that they which do such things *shall not inherit* the Kingdom of God. (Gal. 5:21)
- In Whom also we have obtained an *inheritance*, being predestinated according to the purpose of Him who works all things after the counsel of His Own will... (Eph. 1:11)
- Which is the earnest of our *inheritance* until the redemption of the purchased possession, unto the praise of His glory. (Eph. 1:14)
- The eyes of your understanding being enlightened; that you may know what is the hope of His calling, and what the riches of the glory of His *inheritance* in the saints... (Eph. 1:18)
- For this ye know, that no whoremonger, nor unclean person, nor covetous man, who is an idolater, *has any inheritance* in the kingdom of Christ and of God. (Eph. 5:5)

- Giving thanks unto the Father, which has made us meet to be *partakers of the inheritance* of the saints in light... (Col. 1:12)
- Let no man beguile you of your *reward*... (Col. 2:18)
- Knowing that of the Lord you shall receive *the reward of the inheritance*: for you serve the Lord Christ. (Col. 3:24)
- That you would *walk worthy* of God, Who has called you unto His Kingdom and glory. (1 Thess. 2:12)
- That you may be *counted worthy* of the Kingdom of God, for which you also suffer... (2 Thess. 1:5)
- That being justified by His grace, we should be made *heirs* according to the hope of eternal life. (Tit. 3:7)
- That you be not slothful, but followers of them who through faith and patience *inherit the promises*. (Heb. 6:12)
- And for this cause He is the mediator of the new testament, that by means of death... they which are called might *receive the promise of eternal inheritance*. (Heb. 9:15ff)
- Cast not away therefore your confidence, which has great recompense of *reward*. (Heb. 10:35)
- Wherefore we *receiving a Kingdom* which cannot be moved, let us have grace, whereby we may serve God acceptably with reverence and godly fear. (Heb. 12:28)
- Hear, my beloved brethren, has not God chosen the poor of this world rich in faith, and *heirs of the kingdom* which He has *promised* to them that love Him? (Jam. 2:5)
- To an *inheritance* incorruptible, and undefiled, and that fades not away, *reserved* in heaven for you. (1 Pet. 1:4)
- For so an *entrance* shall be ministered to you abundantly into the *everlasting Kingdom* of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ. (2 Pet. 1:11)

- Look to yourselves, that we lose not those things which we have wrought, but that we *receive a full reward*. (2 Jn. 8)
- He that *overcomes* shall *inherit* all things; and I will be his God, and He shall be My son. (Rev. 21:7)
- And, behold, I come quickly; and My *reward* is with Me, to give every man according as his work shall be. (Rev. 22:12)

The sheer volume of Scriptures cited above demonstrates the prominent place this Kingdom was given in the teachings of Jesus, the ministry of the apostles, and the day-to-day lives of the early believers. When Jesus said, "Many are called, but few are chosen,"²⁴ it is increasingly clear why the Chosen Few were *chosen* in the first place. Their selection was not the result of some mysterious act of predestination over which they had no control; but they were chosen precisely because, out of the many who are called, they were the few who sufficiently prepared themselves to walk worthy of that calling and did not take the King or His Kingdom for granted.

The Gospel According to "Churchianity" Today

Ask a Christian to explain the Kingdom of God to you (as I have), and you will get a variety of different answers. Most cannot answer at all. Some will say it is Heaven, which has become something of a celestial rest home for dearly departed saints. Others will answer that the Kingdom of God refers to a future period of time in which Jesus will reign on the earth for one thousand years. Still others will answer

²⁴ Mt. 22:14. In addition, Rev. 17:14 says they who are with the King of Kings are "called, and chosen, *and faithful*."

with the Scripture that says the Kingdom of God is within you, but will be unable to articulate anything about it beyond quoting the verse.

How is it possible that with all the preaching of "the Gospel" we can still remain so vague and uninformed about the Kingdom of God? When Jesus says, "This Gospel of the Kingdom shall be preached in all the world for a witness unto all nations; and then shall the end come,"²⁵ is it possible that the end is delayed precisely because we have not, and we do not, preach the Gospel of the Kingdom? Is it possible that we do not preach the Gospel of the Kingdom because we do not know what it is? If not, why not? Would a more accurate understanding of the Kingdom of God change our preaching and hasten the end of this age and the beginning of a new one?

With the Biblical record before us, compare what those early disciples believed and preached to what we see and hear being taught and demonstrated in the name of Jesus today. If someone from the apostolic age were to visit our generation, take an account of our lives, document what we preach, and survey what we listen to and currently accept as "The Gospel," how would they respond? Would they be able to say that we preach the Gospel of the Kingdom? Could they report back to their first century friends that we teach the same things they taught concerning the Lord Jesus Christ and the Kingdom of God? Or would they weep and lament at how the *Church* has distorted the original message of the *Ekklesia*?

Perhaps that first century believer, wiping away the tears of disappointment, would remember that this progressive compromise and corruption was actually predicted by Jesus Himself (in the Irresistible Kingdom parables), and that these hindrances to the Kingdom would eventually be swept

²⁵ Mt. 24:14

away in the fires of a judgment that would "begin with the house of the God."²⁶

But do twenty-first century believers know this - or even care? It is more probable that we have spent the majority of our time as Christians preaching and listening to teaching that has little, if anything, to do with the Kingdom of God. As a result, the Body of Christ suffers loss, the Harvest goes unharvested, and the Kingdom of God is unnecessarily hindered and delayed.

Seeking a Kingdom Nobody Talks About

Jesus said, "Seek first the Kingdom of God."²⁷ The Kingdom of God is central to the Gospel according to Jesus, so it is the first thing He tells us to seek. All the other things will be added to us once this foundational understanding is embraced. But without this foundational understanding, this elementary comprehension, can we really hope and expect to gain anything else? And if we do not know what this Kingdom of God really is, how can we seek it at all?

When something is close to our heart then it naturally becomes the substance of our praying. We certainly know how to pray for daily bread because we are conscious of our needs. But just as important, and before we ask for daily bread, Jesus taught us to pray: "Your Kingdom come, Your Will be done, on earth as it is in heaven."²⁸ How can we pray this if we are unclear as to what, precisely, this Kingdom and this Will consists of?

Is there a way to know with certainty what this Kingdom is? Absolutely! Jesus would never tell us to seek first the

²⁶ 1 Pet. 4:17

²⁷ Mt. 6:33

²⁸ Mt. 6:10

Kingdom of God, and to pray daily for the Kingdom to come, without telling us exactly what that Kingdom consists of. What is its nature and character? What is its purpose and reason for being? Where is it? Who may enter it, and how? Who is excluded from it, and why? How is this Kingdom organized and governed? How does it function and operate? What resists it and prevents it from coming? What will it look like when it is fulfilled? What impact will it have on the earth? What are the implications for mankind? And how can we prepare ourselves for it?

These are all good questions. The answers are revealed in the Scriptures, and the purpose of this book is to explore these questions and answers together. Our goal is to set before you God's Vision for all things - to illustrate and illuminate His Eternal Purpose - because you, dear reader, are an important part of that great Purpose of God.

Before We Begin: Some Mental Hurdles to Overcome

As you prepare your heart to receive something spiritually from these pages, it will be helpful to address some of the more common stumbling blocks to understanding the true nature of the Kingdom. These hurdles are primarily mental: our usual way of thinking; the traditions of men; the library of information and disinformation we have already digested on the subject; the little voice in the back of your head that keeps saying, "What about this? What about that?" All these things I encourage you to set aside (at least for the time being) as you read and ponder this Irresistible Kingdom with an open heart and mind. You may find that in the end your questions are answered, or the things you had questions about are no longer as important as you thought they were.

Specifically, there are three areas of faulty thinking that we should be especially mindful of in the context of the Kingdom of God if we intend to grasp it. They are:

1) *Arbitrarily dividing the Gospel from the Kingdom.* The extraordinary Biblical record shows not only the prominence the Kingdom of God had in the teachings of Jesus, but the fact that "the Gospel" is utterly connected to "the Kingdom." We have shown that there is no Gospel that stands alone and apart from the Kingdom. Jesus came into Galilee "preaching the Gospel of the Kingdom of God." The Kingdom of God is what makes the Gospel the *Gospel*. It is the Good News concerning the King and His Kingdom.

This is very significant, because it raises an important issue. If the Gospel as it is preached today scarcely mentions the Kingdom of God (or, if it misrepresents and misleads people with respect to the Kingdom), is it really the Gospel? From a Scriptural perspective, the Kingdom of God is what makes the Gospel the Gospel. But few people today can really articulate what the Kingdom of God is, where it is, or what it means. It is hardly mentioned in what is called "Full Gospel" preaching. If mentioned at all it is only in passing.

It seems clear that we have settled for something less than the Kingdom; and if that is the case, then the Gospel we preach is not really the Gospel. If we are lacking something in our presentation of the Gospel then the people who hear it will go lacking as well. An erroneous, immature Gospel message results in erroneous, immature believers - who (when the truth is eventually revealed) may not even be real believers after all.

2) *Arbitrarily dividing the King from the Kingdom.* The Kingdom is not some "thing" sitting out there somewhere, disconnected and detached from the Person of Christ Himself. It is possible to enter the United Kingdom, live there as a citizen all your life, and never even meet Queen

Elizabeth (much less have a relationship with her); but it is impossible to enter the Kingdom of God without knowing Christ the King. The Kingdom is Christ, and Christ is the Kingdom. Let us not make the mistake of seeking Kingdom "things" and forgetting the One through Whom the "things" come into being in the first place.

Neither is the Kingdom of God something that we go out and build on the earth "for" Jesus. This is where keen discernment is especially needed. There are many so-called Kingdom teachings available to the Body of Christ, but upon close examination you find they are driven by a carnal self-centeredness that focuses, not on Christ, but on how great the Church is, and how powerful believers are - or should be.²⁹ The end result is not a spiritual Kingdom at all; spirituality is only a guise for its real goal: political power. Some even go so far as to say that the Church *is* Christ; not only in sharing His nature and life, but sharing His divinity and deity as well! While the Scriptures are clear that we *are* one Body, there is an important differentiation between the Head and the Body, the Vine and the Branches, the Bride and the Groom. The failure to recognize and preserve this Otherness and preeminence of Christ, has led to minimizing Christ and elevating man - which in turn has resulted in the lack of reverence which characterizes this day and age.

Let the reader understand that we have no intention of lifting up "the Kingdom" as some kind of goal to be achieved through fleshly power, or as something distinct from, and

²⁹ These teachings go by many names, including Kingdom Now, Manifest Sons of God, Latter Rain, etc. Elements of these teachings can be found in a number of apostolic/prophetic movements. Even the Jehovah's Witnesses and the Mormons place a certain amount of emphasis on "the Kingdom." The basic flaw in all the above teachings is the centrality of *man*: what *man* is entitled to, and how *man* can go about to secure something for himself. The resulting infatuation with power, authority, control, and position is the antithesis of the Irresistible Kingdom in which Christ (not man) is the governing center.

unassociated with, Christ Himself. The Kingdom reflects the nature and character of its King, and it is the King that makes the Kingdom worth anything. Please eliminate from your mind any idea of "rising up" or "claiming your inheritance" or lording over saints and sinners or getting elected to political office. This Kingdom of which we are privileged to enter does not revolve around *you*; it revolves around *Him*.

3) *Elevating "the Church" above "the Kingdom."* As we journey towards the Irresistible Kingdom we discover that the idea of a Kingdom goes beyond the rather small realm of any local religious institution. The Kingdom is not easily seen, but Churches are seen everywhere. As a result, some have spent their whole lives focused on their church, their group, their meeting place, their denomination. But Church *is not* the Kingdom of God, and Church *is not* the Ekklesia.

It requires a Kingdom perspective to really grasp what the Ekklesia is here for, and what the Ekklesia is supposed to do. When we see just how encompassing the Kingdom of God really is, then we can more readily grasp the mission of the Ekklesia, and it will also help us to distinguish between that and the false system of religious worship that calls itself Church. To attempt to address these issues apart from a foundational understanding of the Kingdom of God would be premature. The Ekklesia is an extension of the Irresistible Kingdom. It has no identity, no mission, no purpose outside of a Kingdom purpose. First we will establish what that Kingdom *is*, and then we can see more clearly what the Ekklesia is called to be - and why Church cannot fulfill that calling.

Repentance: A Kingdom Perspective

The people to whom Jesus preached already had their own ideas about what the Messiah would do, and what His Kingdom would look like. Unfortunately those ideas were utterly wrong. So Jesus said they needed to repent: to change their heart, to change their mind, to change their behavior, and to get ready to experience something that went totally against their preconceived ideas and notions. To enter the Kingdom of God and to know the King around which this Kingdom is organized requires a radical change on many levels. The way you perceive things, the way you relate to things, the way you understand things – all of it has to be changed. At the very least it must be challenged.

The purpose of this book is to facilitate a change of direction in your life - a change of heart, a change of mind, a change of lifestyle - because that is what repentance really means. As we have already seen, repentance is closely connected to the Kingdom: "The time is fulfilled, and the Kingdom of God is at hand: repent, and believe the Gospel."³⁰ If you are a Christian then you may think this is unnecessary, since you have already "prayed the Sinner's Prayer." May I suggest, however, that repentance is not just for bad people who commit really bad sins. Repentance is a continual process of unlearning something old and embracing something new. It may be a new way of understanding God, or a new way of understanding yourself or the world around you.

Repentance is not only the means through which we *enter* the Kingdom of God, it is also the means through which we *progress* in the Kingdom of God. The path of progress, of spiritual maturity, hinges upon our willingness to let go of the old ways and embrace the new ways; to rise

³⁰ Mk. 1:15

above the lower order of things and walk in a higher order – a heavenly way, a spiritual way, as opposed to the earthly, natural, carnal way that we are so used to walking.

Repentance is a continual process of agreeing with what God shows us about ourselves and then making the necessary adjustments. The Holy Spirit is intent upon making radical adjustments – to create in us a willingness to look at things differently; an eagerness to begin seeing things as God sees them, regardless of how uncomfortable that may be; to value the things that He values and let go of lesser things; to align ourselves with His Mind and Will for all things; to leave our ground altogether and come onto His ground - regardless of the consequences.

Jesus said that to see His Kingdom "you must be born-again."³¹ To enter His Kingdom, He requires us to "become as little children."³² That is another way of saying, "You have to start all over again. You cannot make any progress with Me so long as you cling to the old way of thinking, perceiving, understanding, and interacting. I cannot pour new wine into old wineskins because it would ruin both. You need a new wineskin – a new heart, a new mind, a new understanding of things in order to receive what I wish to give you."

Are you ready to start all over again? If so, then let us go back to the very beginning, before anything was created, and take a peek at what God envisioned before time began.

³¹ Jn. 3:3,7

³² Mt. 18:3

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