

Acts: A Gold Mine of Kingdom Treasures!

Ken LaPrade

Many folks might be currently motivated to ask a person like me, “Why even bother emphasizing *the Gospel of the Kingdom of God* repeatedly? After all, we (as Christians) already believe that Jesus died for our sins and was resurrected. Isn’t that the whole Gospel? So, what then is the big deal about the Kingdom?

Just over 50 years ago, at a memorable event in 1972 where Billy Graham preached, I embraced what I assumed to have been the *full* gospel message when I believed a teaching about John 3:16, accepting basic truths about Jesus’ sacrificial *death* and his subsequent *resurrection*. Shortly thereafter, I found myself closely linked to a group of “dispensationalists” who heartily believed that Jesus died for us - and was raised from the dead, but also asserted that Jesus’ actual teachings (in the four gospels) were exclusively relevant only to Jews living before the day of Pentecost. Hence, according to our old group’s theology, Jesus’ teachings did not really apply directly to Christians. We were in the general boat, so to speak, of believing, according to a C.S. Lewis quote, “The Gospel is not in the gospels,” and, also, according to Billy Graham, “Jesus Christ came to do three days’ work” (referring to his death, burial, and resurrection.) For some three decades I then confidently proclaimed this *nutshell* of Jesus’ atoning **death** and **resurrection**, as if it were the *whole* gospel message. Sadly, I was badly mistaken!

In the context of emphasizing Scriptural fulfillment through Jesus’ **death** and **resurrection**, Paul mentioned these two realities as being (1st Corinthians 15:3) “**among** matters of first importance”; thus, he did not state or imply that these two events constitute the *whole* Gospel message! The same context (the whole of chapter 15) includes bold Kingdom facts which indicate that the rest of the dead *must be raised* in the future when God’s Kingdom will arrive: verses 15-19, 22-25, 50-58. In the even wider Scriptural context (which includes the four gospels), one can clearly see how future Kingdom of God (or Kingdom of heaven) announcements **permeate** a time *before* the prophetic mention of Jesus’ *death* and *resurrection*. For example, in the three Synoptic gospels, at least 30 chapters *precede* the time when Jesus first declared his death and resurrection: Mt. 1-15,

Mk. 1-7, Lk. 1-8. Thus, there is a lengthy time period when Jesus and the twelve successfully preached coming Kingdom truths (and the necessary response of *repentance*) well *before* Jesus' death and resurrection were **added** to the Gospel message.

One might logically ask, "What is the actual **danger** in preaching the partial Gospel of Jesus' death and resurrection *only*, while omitting the foundational truths of Jesus' ardent, devoted (Luke 4:43) preaching of the Kingdom of God?" Well, such a glaring omission could mislead folks into believing that a proactive, obedient response (Luke 13:23-24, Romans 1:5, 16:26, Hebrews 5:9) is *not required*, due, perhaps, to a misconstrued notion of "grace" as doing *nothing!* Also, without the genuine Kingdom *hope*, one could be deceived into grasping a false hope (such as survival after death as a disembodied ghost) or be tempted to ultimately give up in life due to an altogether *lack* of hope! Furthermore, one might neglect the vital nature of staying *faithful* (Hebrews 3:6, 14) in biblical hope until the end of our lives. As an analogy, if one is expert at making electrical connections but fails, as a *basic* step, to unplug (or turn off) the power source before working, he/she could incur deadly consequences! How much more serious are the basics required for salvation!

Luke himself had boldly highlighted future-oriented Gospel-Kingdom truths in his **first** written, well-researched account (Luke 1:3-4): i.e., the Gospel of Luke. His future Kingdom emphasis is so clear in Lk. 4:43 (showing Jesus' divine mission of being sent to preach the Kingdom of God message in other towns.) Luke 8:1, 9:10-11, 18:28-30, 19:11-27, 21:25-36, 22:28-30, and other vibrant passages are part of this picture! In this study we will soon overview the same powerful Kingdom focus in the book of Acts, Luke's **second** written account: Acts 1:1. Far from observing Kingdom vocabulary and its concepts *dropped* or *minimized*, as if some sort of dispensational theory were *really* in place (relegating Jesus' Gospel preaching to being a relic from a previous time frame), Acts boldly declares the coming Kingdom-Gospel truths as still dynamically relevant for at least 25 years *after* the momentous Pentecost events of Acts, chapter 2. In twelve references to be briefly perused, eight passages state truths in Kingdom terms very *directly*, and at least four other records indicate vital concepts linked to essential Kingdom priorities. (Quotations here are from the OGF translation, with occasional emphasis added.)

- (1) After being *resurrected* and while demonstrating “convincing proofs” of truly being alive, Jesus gave commands to the Apostles. According to Acts 1:3b, “He [Jesus] appeared to them over a period of forty days and **spoke about the Kingdom of God.**” Thus, Jesus, as obviously resurrected, spoke for about six weeks about the same central *Kingdom* theme which had dominated his preaching for years during the whole time of the gospels!
- (2) The Apostles then followed up this final, extensive (v.3) Kingdom discussion (with the lord being present) - with a very good, logical question in Acts 1:6: “And so when they had come together they asked him, ‘lord, is this the time when you are going to **restore the Kingdom to Israel?**’” One might keep in mind that the expectation that Jesus “*rescue and restore Israel*” (Luke 24:21) was common to Jesus’ attentive disciples (i.e., students.) One might also recall that previously, within a couple of months of this time, Jesus had boldly promised that they (the Apostles) would eventually sit on thrones (Luke 22: 28-30) governing the tribes of Israel! Jesus did not scold or dismiss their question (in Acts 1:6), as if it represented a foolish obsession with earthly politics – like had been taught (as a dispensationalist!) Jesus was **not** at all like John Calvin, who stated that there are more errors in that verse 6 question than words in the question! Jesus gave a simple reply (Acts 1:7) in terms of God’s *timing*: “He said to them, ‘It is not for you to know **times** or **periods** which the Father has set by His own authority.’” As we shall see, this same book of Acts shows, in its overall context, that the “*Kingdom to Israel*” will be ultimately **restored**.
- (3) As a quick but meaningful reference (in Act 2:29b and 34a) we can observe that, “David both died and was buried, and his tomb is with us to this very day” and, “It was not David who ascended into the heavens” Simply put, the overall biblical picture of the metaphorical *sleep of the dead* (Ps. 13:3, Acts 7:60, 13:36, 1st Cor. 15:17-20) – in an *unconscious* state (Eccl. 9:5-6, 10; Ps. 6:4-5, 115:17) is vital to grasping the Scriptural **need** for the arrival of Jesus and a future Kingdom - to literally **raise** the dead (Dan. 12:2, John 5:28-29)!
- (4) Shortly after the meaningful Kingdom conversation of Acts 1:3, 6-7 and a notable healing miracle, Peter addressed the crowds in Acts 3:19-25a. “**Repent** therefore and turn back, so that your sins may be blotted out and so there may **come times of refreshing** from the presence of the Lord, and

that He will send Jesus, the Messiah appointed for you before. Heaven must retain him [temporarily] **until the times of restoration of all things** [including Israel], which God spoke long ago through His holy prophets. Moses said, [in Deut. 18:15-19] ‘The Lord God will put on the scene of history a prophet like me from among your brothers. You are to **listen to him, everything he says unto you**. Everyone who will not listen to that prophet will be utterly destroyed from among the people.’ And all the prophets who have spoken have announced these days, from Samuel and those who followed after. You are the children of the prophets”

Apparently, upcoming Kingdom realities (**the restoration of all things** – including Israel) are vital tenets of authentic Christian hope! Notice that having *sins blotted out* is tightly linked to the hope of Jesus’ glorious return!

- (5) Acts 8:12 provides us with a succinct summary of Phillip’s ministry to certain Samaritans: “But when they believed Philip heralding **the God about the Kingdom of Gospel** and the name of Jesus the Messiah, they were **being baptized** [in water], both men and women.” The Gospel of the Kingdom of God and all integrity for which Jesus stood - was *still* quite *vital* here to Christian repentance and transformation (along with the devoted, meaningful pledge of baptism.) Such realities were not at all outdated!
- (6) Later on, in southern Galatia (Antioch of Pisidia, Iconium, Lystra, and Derbe) Paul and Barnabas heralded the Kingdom-Gospel, also termed “the word of God.” After severe persecution (including the stoning of Paul), they wisely exhorted the new Galatian converts in Acts 14:22: “They strengthened the disciples and **encouraged** them **to continue in the faith**. They said, ‘It is through **many trials** that **we enter the Kingdom of God.**” Kingdom of God concepts and vocabulary were clearly deeply relevant during times of trials!
- (7) In Acts 17:22-34 when Paul brilliantly and lovingly addressed folks with pagan religious beliefs in Athens, he spoke boldly about Jesus’ future role of judgment in 17:31: “because He has set a day when He will **judge the world** with justice through **a man He has appointed**, and He gave proof to everyone **by resurrecting him from the dead.**” Thus, Paul strongly correlates Jesus’ *resurrection* (as definitive proof) - to his coming Kingdom role to “*judge the world with justice!*” Jesus’ **words** will be critical (John 12:47-50) in that day!

- (8) When “the word” (as sort of a *code* for the Kingdom-Gospel) was strongly pervasive in Ephesus and the province of Asia (in western Turkey), Acts 19:8 states, “Paul entered the synagogue and spoke boldly for a period of three months, addressing and **persuading** them about **the Kingdom of God.**” It is very plain that one does not urgently *persuade* others about outdated norms which are no longer pertinent to the lives of true believers!
- (9) In Acts, chapter 20, when Paul solemnly declared that he had not *held back anything useful* to the gathered elders from Ephesus, in back-to-back phrases he *absolutely linked* “the Gospel of the grace of God” to the “heralding of the Gospel of the Kingdom of God!” Acts 20:24b/ 25a state, “So that I [Paul] may finish my task and the ministry which I received from the lord Jesus: to testify to **the Gospel of the grace of God.** Now I know that you all, among whom I went about **heralding the Gospel of the Kingdom**” Paul then went on in v. 27 to say, “because I did not shrink from declaring to you **the whole plan of God.**” Very far from *separating* “the grace of God” from *Kingdom preaching*, Paul correlates them as synonymous concepts, two phrases which constitute “*the whole plan of God!*” So, it is crystal clear that (according to a misguided dispensational theology), a “new” Pauline Gospel of grace **never replaced** an outmoded Kingdom-Gospel! The back-to-back use here of phrases about Paul’s essential message - make them two ways of referring to the same Gospel!
- (10) When Paul defended himself from false accusations before Felix, a Roman governor, he used the occasion to pour out his heart (Acts 24:14-16) about what deeply motivated his conscience: “But I [Paul] confess this to you [Felix]: According to the Way which they call a sect, I serve the God of our fathers, believing everything taught in the Law and written in the prophets. I have the same hope in God as they have, **that there will be a resurrection of both the just and unjust.** That is why I do my best to always have a **clear conscience** before God and before people.” (See Daniel 12:1-3 and John 5:25-29.) Living *conscientiously* (like Paul did), based on two literal, future resurrections is to stand firmly on the truth of prominent Kingdom realities!
- (11) The book of Acts basically closes much like it had begun, with a sharp focus on Kingdom of God treasures! In Rome, Paul met with certain Jewish leaders to engage in important discussions: Acts 28:23-24. “They set a day

to meet with him [Paul], and came in even greater numbers to the place where he was staying. From morning till night Paul explained to them, **testifying about the Kingdom of God** and trying to convince them about Jesus from both the Law of Moses and the prophets. Some of them were **persuaded** by what Paul said, but others refused to believe.”

(12) Finally, we see the striking conclusion to the entire book in Acts 28:30-31: “Paul stayed two full years there in his own rented house, and he welcomed everyone who came to him, **proclaiming the Gospel of the Kingdom of God** and **teaching about the lord Jesus Messiah** with complete openness and without restriction.”

From overviewing these twelve dynamic passages in Acts (covering a time period of at least twenty-five years), **when** could one document that the Kingdom of God Gospel was ever **replaced** by another - *minimized* Gospel?

Never!

When was Kingdom preaching effectively **reduced** to mere preaching about Jesus’ death and resurrection, while **omitting** the required foundation of Jesus’ vital **words** concerning *repentance* in light of a coming, future Messianic *government* (or **Kingdom**) to be powerfully implemented on earth (Mt. 5:5, 6:10)?

Once again, **never!**

Jesus said, “But seek **His Kingdom**, and these things [material needs] will be provided for you. Do not be afraid, little flock, because your Father **is delighted to give you the Kingdom.**” Luke 12:31-32

This broadly pictured Kingdom reality is a vital promise, *central* to overall biblical priorities. It is **not** at all a frivolous exercise in *wishful thinking!*