

WHAT IS “THE GOSPEL OF THE KINGDOM”?

Let me begin by saying that this is not a heavy, theological article (I’m not sure I could write one anyway☺), but an honest, practical attempt to come up with a working definition of “the gospel of the Kingdom.” The dilemma seems to be that while we may understand that the biblical gospel consists of 2 parts - “the good news about the kingdom of God” and “the name of Jesus” (Acts 8:12) - we may not understand just what that is. If you’ve ever tried to explain it to someone and couldn’t, then it is probably safe to say that you don’t personally understand it. I can appreciate the dilemma.

Is there some way to summarize the gospel of the kingdom? Is it possible to reduce the essence of it down to something we can know and share with others?

My first assumption is that this may be an impossible task. Acts 1:3 indicates that Jesus spent his last 40 days on earth explaining the kingdom of God to his disciples. If there is that much material to know and understand, what possible chance do we have of knowing it well enough to share it with others?

We know that the disciples DID go out with this message, but they likely did not try to get potential converts to commit to a daily 6-week seminar in order to “be saved.” The Apostle Paul, in particular, did spend extended time teaching about the gospel of the kingdom (Acts 19:8), but there apparently must have been a “shorter version” of the kingdom gospel that the Early Church shared. Otherwise it seems unlikely that the message would have ever gone out.

While I think that it may be risky to try and reduce the gospel of the kingdom down to a simple formula, I believe that we each need to have a basic “kingdom gospel outline” to work from in order to share this essential message with others. Before I suggest to you a possible outline, let me point out some serious mistakes that have been made in the past by those trying to do something similar.

Maybe you have heard of “The Four Spiritual Laws.” They are the result of the efforts of some to come up with a simple formula for easily sharing the gospel. As such, these “Laws” are:

1. God LOVES you and offers a wonderful PLAN for your life.
2. Man is SINFUL and SEPARATED from God. Therefore, he cannot know and experience God's love and plan for his life.
3. Jesus Christ is God's ONLY provision for man's sin. Through Him you can know and experience God's love and plan for your life.
4. We must individually RECEIVE Jesus Christ as Savior and Lord; then we can know and experience God's love and plan for our lives.

Sounds like a good, simple system for sharing the gospel, right? The only problem is that these “Spiritual Laws” don’t include the good news about the kingdom. They are all about “the name of Jesus” but not about his role as King of the Kingdom.

Another popular tool for sharing the gospel is “The Roman Road”. It consists of these points:

1. Romans 3:23 "For all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God."
2. Romans 6:23a "...The wages of sin is death..."
3. Romans 6:23b "...But the gift of God is eternal life through Jesus Christ our Lord."
4. Romans 5:8, "God demonstrates His own love for us, in that while we were yet sinners Christ died for us!"
5. Romans 10:13 "Whoever will call on the name of the Lord will be saved!"
6. Romans 10:9,10 "...If you confess with your mouth Jesus as Lord, and believe in your heart that God raised Jesus from the dead, you shall be saved; for with the heart man believes, resulting in righteousness, and with the mouth he confesses, resulting in salvation."

Again, this is a fairly simple gospel presentation to remember and share, but it doesn’t include the “gospel of the kingdom.”

So, let me share with you some “basics” that might work for a “gospel of the kingdom” presentation. Perhaps we can work together to refine, complete, revise, etc. this outline.

1. The ultimate plan of God is bring the earth back to perfection, as it was in the beginning.
2. God has appointed His Son, Jesus, to be the King of this perfect future age
3. Jesus came into the world the first time to announce the coming of the hidden Kingdom (“the mysteries of the kingdom”) and to prepare for the future visible Kingdom. (Isaiah 9:7)
4. Jesus came to pay the price for all people’s sin by his death on the cross, burial, and resurrection from the dead.
5. Those who accept Jesus’ sacrifice by faith and are baptized are granted forgiveness of sin, inner renewal through Holy Spirit, and hope of immortality in the coming Kingdom (Colossians 1:13)
6. Believers are brought into the present hidden Kingdom (Revelation 1:6; 5:10) and are placed in training to co-rule the earth with Jesus in the future Kingdom.(Daniel 7:18) This training consists of godly lifestyle (1 Thessalonians 2:10-12) and good stewardship of time and talents.
7. At death believers cease to exist until the resurrection at the 2nd Coming of Jesus. Thoughts perish, the breath returns to God, and the body returns to the dust.
8. Dead believers are given immortality along with living believers at the time of Jesus’ return to establish God’s Kingdom on earth. At that time believers will rule the world with Jesus.

I’ll leave you with a simple illustration that helps me see a bit more clearly the difference between “the gospel” and “the gospel of the kingdom.”

Imagine that you knew nothing about George Washington. If I were to tell you about his character (honesty, leadership, etc.) you might come to appreciate that he was a good man. But probably none of this would cause you to regard him any differently than other people that you know who had similar character traits.

The most significant thing I could tell you about him was that he was the President of the United States. When you learn this about him you see his life in a different light – you see a direction and purpose that you did not see before. You see that there is a certain dynamic to his life that you did not previously see.

So it is with Jesus. If we talk about him as a person we can focus on his strengths – his teaching authority, compassion, even his sacrificial death. We basically come away with the picture of “a nice guy” not unlike other great teachers throughout the ages. But when we put him in the perspective as King of the coming Kingdom we begin to see a dynamic Jesus – not a “nice guy” trapped in history, but a King who is alive and building his Kingdom today, and preparing to return to rule the world.

I believe this is the Jesus of the Bible, and this is the Jesus we need to know and share.