

The Gospel of the Kingdom of God.

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UNDER the influence of a deepened or renewed sense of the importance of certain evangelical truths there are symptoms of a revolt from the idea of 'the Kingdom of God' as being adequate to embrace the entire Christian gospel. When that term was 'rediscovered' some years ago, it was felt to indicate a great advance on the conceptions which at that time dominated Theology, although there was always a danger of taking it in such a restricted sense as should exclude much that belongs to the 'saving truths' of the gospel. For many reasons it would be a great misfortune were we to give up that which was Christ's own conception of the gospel, and it would be well before doing so to inquire whether it is the term itself that is inadequate or our own conception of its scope.

The gospel that Jesus preached was undoubtedly the gospel of the Kingdom, and under this term of the Kingdom of God He included all that was distinctive in His teaching. It was that, too, which should *come* when His work was completed, and, while it was founded in Time it extended into Eternity. The Kingdom was something that came 'without observation' and was present in the heart; yet it was also that in which His followers should have their everlasting joy and reward. He Himself was the Lord of the Kingdom. With Christ the Kingdom of God was certainly the dominating and the all-embracing conception.

With Paul, however, elements came in which it is sometimes supposed cannot be embraced or adequately represented under the idea of the Kingdom. Yet Paul as well as Jesus preached the gospel of the Kingdom. In the synagogue at Ephesus, and when at Rome he met the representatives of the Jews, his testimony was of 'the Kingdom of God,' and the Book of Acts closes with the statement that Paul remained in Rome, 'preaching the Kingdom of God, and teaching the things concerning the Lord Jesus Christ' (see also Ac 20, 25). With Paul as with Jesus the Kingdom of God was the general designation of the gospel; to the Romans (14¹⁷) he says, 'the Kingdom of God is not eating and drinking, but

righteousness, peace, and joy in the Holy Spirit,' and to the Corinthians (1st Ep. 4²⁰), 'the Kingdom of God is not in word but in power'; in both instances the term is evidently used as the designation of the gospel generally. And with Paul, as with Jesus, the Kingdom was not only something present (as the foregoing quotations indicate), but something to come also—that in which the Christian believer was to have his future eternal inheritance (Gal 5²¹, etc.). The Christ that he preached was the Lord of the Kingdom, who was reigning, and who should reign till He had put all enemies under His feet and delivered up the Kingdom, completely won, to God, even the Father (1 Co 15^{24, 25}).

Paul's use of the term, therefore, was the same as his Master's. What ground is there for thinking that its contents differed? We certainly find much theology in Paul which we do not find explicitly in Jesus. But is not Paul's theology simply the filling up of the idea of the Kingdom as it existed in the mind of Jesus in view of His completed work in relation to the Kingdom? To Jesus, prior to His death on the Cross, the Kingdom had not yet come, in its truth [and fulness. While He preached the gospel of the Kingdom, His disciples were to keep praying, 'Thy Kingdom come!'] To some of them He said that they should not see death till they had seen the Kingdom come in power. He was to drink the new wine with them in their Father's Kingdom. There can scarcely be a doubt that in His own view He died to bring the Kingdom in. He had proclaimed its coming: this was the gospel which He invited men to believe. But it did not come in that fulness and power which would make its coming a real gospel for men. What kept it back? This was the momentous question. It was *sin*, and He gave Himself as 'a sacrifice to take away sin,' that the Kingdom of God might come; in other words, that the gospel which He had proclaimed might become a blessed reality in the experience of men. Now this is just what Paul teaches in the 'theological' portions of his Epistles. In the Epistle to the Romans (as we see from Ro 14¹⁷) he is still thinking of the

gospel as that of the Kingdom of God, and in the opening portion of that Epistle he has shown how the death of Christ on our behalf took away the barrier that stood between man and God, so that the Kingdom of God might come in all its blessed power, first, into the individual heart reconciled to God. But it was ultimately to come in the whole wide world, through the victory of Christ the Lord over all His foes, when it should be delivered up to God as a perfected Kingdom, and God should be all in all.

It seems quite clear, then, that with Paul the Kingdom was still the dominating conception, and that what we need is not to get away from the idea, but to make our conception of the Kingdom wide enough, deep enough, and true enough to embrace Paul's theology. We cannot, indeed, be loyal to the Spirit's teaching through Paul if we fail to do this. Under no term can we better gather up Paul's evangelical teaching than under this of the Kingdom of God. For, let us ask what in reality is that Kingdom? It is the reign of God in men's hearts. It was this, first of all, with Jesus, and it was the same thing with Paul—God reigning in His Divine-fatherly Kingdom in the heart, and manifesting His gracious presence as He of whom His children are accepted—children in whom He is well pleased, and with whom He dwells. That which stands in the way of this joyous experience on men's part is sin—both as that to which the Divine Righteous-

ness is opposed, and as that in man which closes the heart to God and His Kingdom. Was it not the very purpose of the death of Christ to take away sin in both of these aspects; so to satisfy the Divine Righteousness that God could draw nigh to sinners in acceptance, and so to move the heart that it should gladly submit itself to God? *Then* the Kingdom of God comes into the heart—that Kingdom which is 'righteousness and peace and joy in the Holy Ghost'; and just as human hearts thus become God's, and wholly His, does the Kingdom extend itself in the world, until Christ has thus completely won the Kingdom for the Father, and it becomes the eternal inheritance of His children. The Kingdom of God is spiritual, and its coming depended on the coming of the Spirit. It was as the Spirit came in power that the Kingdom came. But that Spirit could not so come till Christ's work in the flesh was finished and He Himself 'glorified.' Paul shows *how* Christ's necessary work was done, and how Jesus became that 'Son of God in power' who brought this Spiritual Kingdom in, and who as its Lord shall yet establish it universally.

Much more might be said, but the foregoing may be sufficient to show that the idea of the Kingdom was neither changed nor transformed by Paul, but simply filled out by those elements of the work of Christ which bring in the Kingdom in its power, and which make the gospel of the Kingdom a real gospel in the experience of men.

Recent Biblical Archaeology.

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SIR CHARLES WILSON has just revised *The Bible Atlas* of the Society for Promoting Christian Knowledge. It is needless to say that the maps and plans in it have been made as perfect as the present state of our knowledge can allow them to be. The editor has an unrivalled acquaintance with his subject, and he has embodied in the *Atlas* all the latest information, a good deal of which is derived from his own experiences in the lands of the Bible hardly more than a year ago. The maps are exceedingly clear, as well as trustworthy and numerous, and in the explanatory notes and

exhaustive geographical index prefixed to them by the late Mr. Samuel Clark and Sir George Grove the reader will find all that he can desire to know about the geography and ethnology of the Bible.

Doubtless, certain of the notes relate to questions which are still matters of controversy, and to which I would myself return a different answer from that given by their author. As regards the route of the Exodus, for example, and the position of Sinai, he has misapprehended the theory I have put forward, and consequently his arguments against it are beside the mark, as may be seen by a reference to