

## What is the Gospel? (Part 3)

In rediscovering the gospel, we engage Mark 1:14-15, and we discover the gospel is not all about us and a rapturous happily-ever-after eternity. It is about God. It is about his dream, his plan, and his intention for the cosmos. It starts with him, concerns him, and ends in him. When we start late in the story with the fall and man (Genesis 3), the story becomes all about us and is really just another consumer item to secure a quality afterlife. The good news has its genesis in God. We discover that it is really about the present reality of the kingdom—the rule and reign of God invading the domain of Adam through the person of Jesus.

Jesus announced, “The time has come—the kingdom of God has come near.” All the ground work had been laid and history had reached a climatic moment. This phrase ties everything together: the past (God’s eternal purpose to adopt humanity and include them in his life), the present (the current in-breaking of the kingdom), and the future (the ultimate completion that the present kingdom guarantees). God’s kingdom was present in a way that it had not been since the time of Adam and Eve.

Each one of us has a kingdom—a realm where our decisions determine what happens. Through the words, works, and person of Jesus, the realm of God’s will (where what God wants is done) was near. Some Christians are disappointed when they realize that Jesus’ words about the kingdom have more to do with right here and now rather than just going to heaven when they die. So many have said a prayer to get into heaven, but they don’t understand how to live in the present hour!

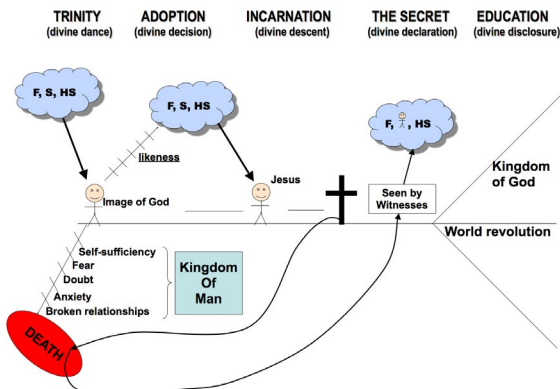
Maybe our evangelism is less about asking people, “If you were to die tonight, do you know where you would go?” and more about, “If you wake up tomorrow, whom will you follow?” or “What is the the most basic and fundamental story around which you are organizing and living your life?” We can say to people, “We believe the rule and reign of God is present and here with us. What do you think about it?” I have asked people: “If you could know who God is and what he is up to in the world, would you want to be a part of it?” Eternal life is not about some kind of existence off in the future, rather it is the reality of a different kind of living right now. The life that Jesus invited people into was an immersion into the reality of God right here, right now! This is also what we do; we invite others into the most attractive life possible now—to be enjoyed in an immediate, intimate, daily, cooperative interaction with the Living God.

Jesus tells us that the way to experience the life of God and to allow it to manifest itself in our daily routines is to repent and believe. We have to have our minds turned around and think again. Our whole way of understanding and doing life has to be scrutinized in light of what Jesus is communicating. We must believe him. Faith is not just mental assent, but more of a whole-life term that describes our placing complete confidence in something (or Someone). We are called to believe rightly—not just in terms of mere content but in actually trusting Jesus.

A metaphor for faith is the story that Jesus told of the one who found the pearl of great price. They encountered the pearl and were astonished. A great awakening took place inside them. The person then agreed that this was what they had been searching for all of their life. They sold everything they had to arrange their life around this new opportunity. If we were to dissect faith it might contain these three elements: an awakening (new found awareness), agreement (or an acknowledging), and alignment (arranging our life around the opportunity).

So Jesus’ gospel is an invitation into the kingdom of God—into a realm where students of Jesus joyfully accept his offer to die to empty ways of doing life and cultivating our own kingdoms so that we can receive and enter into the vastly superior life of the reign of God. We now inflict less damage on the world as we become part of God’s solution and join him in his ongoing mission of love.

We talked about two different ways we might share this good news with others. Here are the images.



- 1<sup>st</sup> Lie – Separation
- 2<sup>nd</sup> Lie – Self-salvation
- 3<sup>rd</sup> Lie – Scruples
- 4<sup>th</sup> Lie – Standards
- 5<sup>th</sup> Lie – Scorecard
- 6<sup>th</sup> Lie – Scales

## For Reflection:

- Would you say that the set of propositions regarding man and his sin that is commonly referred to as the “gospel” has a tendency to cause people who hear it to become full-time disciples of Jesus? Why or why not? How might starting with God, his infinite love for every person, and his desire to adopt every individual bring about a more positive change of mind and heart?
- In describing what it means to fully trust him, Jesus used the story of a person who found a pearl of great value. Upon finding it, they went away, sold all they had, and came back and bought the pearl. What might that look like in your own life? How are you arranging your life around the wonderful opportunity of living in the reality of the kingdom of God?
- Who could you be encouraging to know God and to become a part of what he is doing in the world? What might be a loving and gentle way to begin that conversation? How are you praying for them?