

1 - Jesus' Three-Line Gospel

Jesus announced His Gospel very simply, as recorded in Mark 1:15:

"The time has come," he said. "The kingdom of God is near. Repent and believe the good news!"

To understand the Gospels and the person and mission of Jesus we need to understand what this simple statement meant to Jesus and his hearers. There are three parts we need to understand:

1. The time has come
2. The kingdom of God is near
3. Repent and believe the good news

The Time has Come

The first part of Jesus' gospel was "The time has come". This made sense to people because they were expecting God's Kingdom would one day be established, and John's preaching made people expectant:

The people were waiting expectantly and were all wondering in their hearts if John might possibly be the Christ. (Lk 3:15)

This expectation was based on many prophecies, spanning the entire period of the Old Testament, concerning a coming new Kingdom of God. Here is a small selection:

"The LORD your God will raise up for you a prophet like me from among your own brothers. You must listen to him." (De 18:15 NIV)

In the last days the mountain of the LORD's temple will be established as chief among the mountains; it will be raised above the hills, and all nations will stream to it. Many peoples will come and say, "Come, let us go up to the mountain of the LORD, to the house of the God of Jacob. He will teach us his ways, so that we may walk in his paths." (Isa 2:2-3)

For to us a child is born, to us a son is given, and the government will be on his shoulders. And he will be called Wonderful Counsellor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace. Of the increase of his government and peace there will be no end. He will reign on David's throne and over his kingdom, establishing and upholding it with justice and righteousness from that time on and for ever. (Isa 9:6-7)

Rejoice greatly, O Daughter of Zion! Shout, Daughter of Jerusalem! See, your king comes to you, righteous and having salvation, gentle and riding on a donkey, on a colt, the foal of a donkey. I will take away the chariots from Ephraim and the war-horses from Jerusalem, and the battle-bow will be broken. He will proclaim peace to the nations. His rule will extend from sea to sea and from the River to the ends of the earth. (Zech 9:9-10)

Prophecies like these gave the Israelites an unquenchable expectation that one day God would visit His chosen people and restore their fortunes under a Godly king in David's line.

The Kingdom of God is Near

The second part of Jesus' gospel was "The kingdom of God is near". The prophecies did not just point to a coming Saviour, but to a whole new covenant with God in a new Kingdom under God's rule:

"The time is coming," declares the LORD, "when I will make a new covenant with the house of Israel and with the house of Judah. It will not be like the covenant I made with their forefathers when I took them by the hand to lead them out of Egypt, because they broke my covenant, though I was a husband to them," declares the LORD. This is the covenant that I will make with the house of Israel after that time," declares the LORD. "I will put my law in their minds and write it on their hearts. I will be their God, and they will be my people. No longer will a man teach his neighbour, or a man his brother, saying, 'Know the LORD,' because they will all know me, from the least of them to the greatest," declares the LORD. "For I will forgive their wickedness and will remember their sins no more." (Jer 31:31-34)

"My servant David will be king over them, and they will all have one shepherd. They will follow my laws and be careful to keep my decrees. They and their children and their children's children will live in the Promised Land for ever, and David my servant will be their prince for ever. I will make a covenant of peace with them; it will be an everlasting covenant. ... My dwelling-place will be with them; I will be their God, and they will be my people. Then the nations will know that I the LORD make Israel holy" (Ezek 37:24-28)

"The Spirit of the Sovereign LORD is on me, because the LORD has anointed me to preach good news to the poor. He has sent me to bind up the broken-hearted, to proclaim freedom for the captives and release from darkness for the prisoners, to proclaim the year of the LORD's favour and the day of vengeance of our God, to comfort all who mourn, and provide for those who grieve in Zion—to bestow on them a crown of beauty instead of ashes, the oil of gladness instead of mourning, and a garment of praise instead of a spirit of despair. They will be called oaks of righteousness, a planting of the LORD for the display of his splendour ... You will feed on the wealth of nations, and in their riches you will boast. (Isa 61:1-6)

Prophecies like these promised a whole new relationship with God in a new kind of Kingdom where God would dwell amongst His people.

Repent and Believe the Good News

The final part of Jesus' gospel was "Repent and believe the good news"; in other words, "Repent and believe that the Kingdom is here". Or even more explicitly "Repent of thinking the Kingdom would never come and start believing that it is now here".

From the very beginning, God's people had struggled with disobedience, and the main cause of their disobedience was that the great promise of God's Kingdom amongst His people never came to pass. It was always a future promise, so they lost heart and followed the ways of the world. They needed to repent of their waywardness and respond in obedience to the prophet's message:

"If my people, who are called by my name, will humble themselves and pray and seek my face and turn from their wicked ways, then will I hear from heaven and will forgive their sin and will heal their land." (2 Ch 7:14)

Afterward the children of Israel shall return and seek the LORD their God, and David their king, and they shall come in fear to the LORD and to his goodness in the latter days. (Hosea 3:5)

The kind of repentance that both John the Baptist and Jesus called for was not simply the acknowledgement that we have done some bad things and saying sorry to God for them. It was a complete change of direction; turning from thinking God was distant and irrelevant to recognising He was right here, right now! It meant adopting a new way of life, a new world-view.

Receive Forgiveness

The Kingdom of God includes the amazing promise "I will hear from heaven and forgive their sin". God's forgiveness was also a vital part of Jesus' Gospel. Luke records these words of Jesus (Luke 24: 47)

"Repentance for the forgiveness of sins will be preached in his name to all nations."

The wonderful conclusion to the Good News is that for those who believe the Kingdom has come, and obey Jesus the King, Jesus grants forgiveness from our sins so we can enjoy His presence with us.

The essential thing to note at this point in our study is that Jesus' Gospel is focused on the Kingdom. It was the Good News that the Kingdom had come!

The New Testament calls this "The Gospel of the Kingdom".