

“Think” Kingdom!

“I must preach the good news of the Kingdom of God. . .because that is why I was sent” —
Jesus, Luke 4:43

Over the years the message from the creator has come to us in bits and pieces, at times subtle hints, and sometimes directly stated, yet incomprehensible, shrouded in mystery, packaged...waiting the moment to be opened. The theme of the message was His Kingdom, the Creator’s domain, represented abstractly by prophets and poets. It was the Creator’s word, His thoughts, expressed by His creation in the language of man. His ultimate and tangible expression, however, was his one and only *begotten son*. As the writer of Hebrews pens...*In the past God spoke to us through the prophets at many times and in various ways*. The poets also hinted at it, played with it, titillated us with thoughts, prose and conjecture, *but finally He spoke to us by His Son, whom he appointed heir of all things, and through whom he [God] made the universe*.

John, the writer of the fourth Gospel, gives us a perspective of the person Jesus, the appointed heir, *through whom He made the universe*, when in his opening remarks; John proffers Jesus as a personification of the text in the opening of Genesis. *In the beginning was the **Word**, and the **Word** was with God, and the **Word** was God. He was with God in the beginning*. John chooses the Greek word, **Lōgōs (λόγος)**, meaning a “word” uttered by a “living voice”. This embodies a concept or idea, an expression of thought. The Hebrew equivalent **dābar** suggests a prophetic revelation, to make a thing known, so that to grasp the “word” is to grasp the “thought” of the mind of the maker. *Through him, **the Word**, all things were made; without him nothing was made that has been made*. The Apostle Paul poignantly expands the thought in his letter to the Colossians. *He [the Son] is the image of the invisible God, the first born over all creation. For, by Him all things were created; things in heaven and on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or powers or rulers, or authorities; all things were created by Him and for Him. He is before all things, and in Him all things hold together*.

In English the term “word” is a static representation of meaning and is not helpful to understanding the importance of John’s use of the Greek term **Lōgōs (λόγος)**. It is from this Greek word we derive and use the English word “logo”. A logo is a visible image, an expression of a company’s ideas and concepts. In this sense, Jesus “**the Word**” of God is, as Paul says it, *the image of the invisible God*.

The Word, Jesus, the **Lōgōs (λόγος)**, is a “concept” an “idea” of the Kingdom itself. The Kingdom of God, simply put, is the domain of the King, the will of the Creator for us, his creation...that which he hath made. It is this which Jesus spoke when he taught his disciples to pray to the Father...“Your” Kingdom come, “Your will” be done on earth, as it is in heaven. It is within this understanding that we proceed, comprehending Christ the only begotten Son, the **Lōgōs**. His Message...Think Kingdom!

Jesus was “the preeminent **Word** of God” in the flesh. “The **Word** became flesh and made his dwelling among us (pitched his tent among us a direct reference to the Tabernacle). We have seen his glory, the glory of the One and Only (or the only begotten), who came from the Father, full of grace and truth. The term “**Full**”, in the Greek is **plēres** (πλήρης), replete, abundantly supplied, in the commonly used Greek, a “fully manned” ship, loaded ready to sail. **The Word** came complete, fully loaded with **grace, charis** (χάρις) graciousness of manner and **truth aletheia** (ἀλήθεια) verity, concealing nothing.

When **The Word** came among us his message was clear; the time has come, the Kingdom of God is here. Jesus the physical embodiment of the abstract “word” of the prophets and poets emerged as the tangible “word”. But, the religionists, the very ones who had guarded the scriptures of antiquity, those who had waited, when he came, they resisted his message denying the very scriptures that predicted His coming. It was contrary to their expectations. *He was in the world, and though the world was made through him, the world did not recognize him. He came to that which was his own, but his own did not receive him.* Repent, change your mind turn about face and believe the good news of my Father’s Kingdom, he challenged them. *You diligently study the Scriptures because you think that by them you possess eternal life. These are the Scriptures that testify about me, yet you refuse to come to me to have life.*

Dismantling words in lieu of concepts of the Kingdom, Jesus’ reaction to the religious resistance was piercing and powerful. “Do not think that I have come to abolish the Law or the Prophets; I have come not to abolish them but to fulfill them. He explained. *I tell you the truth, until heaven and earth disappear, not the smallest letter, not the least stroke of the pen; will by any means disappear from the Law until everything is accomplished. Anyone who breaks one of the least of these commandments and teaches others to do the same will be called least in the kingdom of heaven, but whoever practices and teaches these commands will be called great in the kingdom of heaven.* His implication should be obvious. He includes the Pharisees in the “least” category not the “great”. *For I tell you, he says, that unless your righteousness surpasses that of the Pharisees and the teachers of the law, you will certainly not enter the Kingdom of Heaven.*

Do not mistakenly think Jesus is speaking of religious duty with regard to keeping commandments. He recognized the importance of keeping the law not just in written word but also in the spirit or intent of the law. According to Jesus, the Pharisees did not “practice” nor did they “teach” the intent of the Law. *Woe to you, teachers of the Law and Pharisees, he distinctly pronounces, you hypocrites! You give a tenth of your spices—mint, dill and cumin. But you have neglected the more important matters of the Law—justice, mercy and faithfulness.*

The truth is, he tells them, the Law will not disappear until everything intended is accomplished and fulfilled in **the Word** who is among you. Jesus message of grace is the fulfillment. This is what he came to preach, the “good news” of the Kingdom that surpassed the self-righteousness of the religious order, giving entrance into the Kingdom prepared for us from the beginning. “Good news”, you are forgiven, saved by grace not of works! The door of *Grace* is the only entrance into the Kingdom. We have indeed, as John said, *seen his glory, full of grace and truth.*

Jesus in his own words to his followers said; *I must preach the good news of the Kingdom of God to other towns also, because that is why I was sent”...So, when you read the words of Jesus, search for the meaning of his parables or the truth in his sermons, don’t think church dogma, rigid religious duty or what you must do to be saved...Think Kingdom!*

Every breath of Jesus earthly existence was used to espouse the message of his Father’s Kingdom. He was **the Word** of the Kingdom. It is why he was sent. It is why he came. Jesus Christ preached the Kingdom of God, incarnated it and died for it.

Concerning this salvation, Peter wrote in his first epistle, the prophets, who spoke of the “grace” that was to come to you, searched intently and with the greatest care, trying to find out the time and circumstances to which the Spirit of Christ in them was pointing when he predicted the sufferings of Christ and the glories that would follow...even angels long to look into these things.

Do not let the term *salvation*, used by Peter in this passage deter you from the intent of his statement. In Judaism salvation is understood as deliverance. “*This salvation*” Peter speaks of, in the Jewish understanding this deliverance, is the grace of God displayed in the sacrificial “Lamb” slain for our sins, confessed or denied. *This salvation* is secured through “*the grace that was to come to you*”, spoken of by the prophets. Against the requirements of the law and demands of Jewish believers in Jerusalem, Peter is encouraging the Gentile followers to which his Epistle was written, to accept the “good news”; you are saved, forgiven, loved with no expectation of religious ritual required. This is the **Word** of the Kingdom.

The proclamation of the Kingdom was born from the urgency in the heart of Jesus. It was crucial that he bring the “good news” of the Gospel of Grace; if only people could realize their own belovedness, their lives would be transformed and a new Kingdom would spring into being. —Brennan Manning

“Jesus came preaching the Kingdom, what arrived was the church”. This statement issued by Alfred Loisy a French Roman Catholic priest, was anything but a compliment. The Church Angry by the infamous declaration within a matter of years excommunicated the professor and theologian.

Alfred Loisy’s quote fundamentally implies something went wrong and begs us to study what is Kingdom versus what is church? It begs us to contextualize the teachings of Jesus against today’s accepted dogma. Even in its most meager interpretation, Loisy’s quote suggests that something once fundamental to the key tenets of Christianity is now perhaps systematically defunct.

Jesus original message of the Kingdom has been manipulated into an official theology. Believers’ common conceptualization of Jesus unfortunately, is inextricably connected with the church. Similarly how one interprets Jesus message is also influenced by the “church” and established dogma. This is unacceptable. The man we call Jesus must not be viewed through the prism of Christianity.

Our Christology and comprehension of the Kingdom must start with Jesus of Nazareth. Understanding the Son of God and his message of the Kingdom are inseparable. Jesus of Nazareth did not found a church or create a structure to build one. He established no doctrines or dogmas and set down no accepted way to follow him or even believe in him. This is why we must not view Jesus through what we call his “church”. I agree with Robert Noland’s assessment that *many millions throughout the ages have venerated the name of Jesus, but few have understood him and fewer still have tried to put into practice what he wanted to see done. His words have been twisted and turned to mean everything, anything and nothing.*

The question is, if Jesus came to preach the Kingdom and what resulted was “church”, has the Kingdom come? The answer is in understanding the relationship between the message of the Kingdom and the messenger Jesus. Origen called Jesus the **auto-basilia**, which is the Kingdom in person. On his showing the Kingdom is not a place or an abstract concept like ‘ruling’ or ‘saving rule’ but a person—Jesus himself; therefore wherever he is there is the Kingdom. *For where two or three are gathered together in my name, Jesus said, there I am in the midst of them,* in essence the Kingdom among you.

Jesus is “**the Word**” of the Kingdom. He is the expression of the will of the Father in the earth, *the image of the invisible God, the first born over all creation.* The Kingdom is among us, within the implanted seed in the parable of the Sower. The Kingdom is here; our failure is in Kingdom proclamation.

Jesus message of the Kingdom was his passion and it should be our kerygma, inspired by the urgency in the heart of Jesus. Jesus uttered, by far, the largest predictions and spoke most concerning the spread of his spiritual empire. "A Kingdom not of this world" no temporal sovereignty no force was to be used in the founding or extension of it however it would be an influence far deeper and wider than any secular rule. Like the plant that springs from the tiny mustard-seed or a man scatters seed on the ground this is what the Kingdom of God is like, Jesus says.

The phrase Kingdom of God/Heaven in the New Testament shows up 122 times, 99 of those are in the Synoptic Gospels, and 90 of the 99 are predicated of Jesus.

When you read the gospels, instead of church teaching...Think Kingdom!

When you read the parables of Jesus, in lieu of church doctrine...Think Kingdom!

When you read the scriptures old or new, rather than church theology...Think Kingdom!

The *Gospel* "good news" of the Kingdom was the only message of Jesus. A message embedded in every parable, conversation and sermon.

We must "think" and "preach" with passion, "the Gospel of the Kingdom", for it is "good news" to a world weary of injustice, prejudice and hatred. Paul S. Minear wrote these profound words in May of 1942, which are as needed today as then, "*If the kingdom be a reality, the gospel has inescapable significance; if the kingdom be a delusion, the power of the gospel evaporates*".

In every generation God has had a voice attempting to call us to preach the Kingdom. But, it constantly falls on deaf ears. This is the consistent cry in the book of Revelation, "*he who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the church*" [Gr. *Ecclesia*]. Paul S. Minear was such a voice in 1942 and still his words, years later, go unheeded. As he said, the Kingdom must become a reality so the gospel of that Kingdom can have inescapable significance, for if it is a delusion the gospel indeed evaporates.

In you and in me the gospel of the Kingdom will reach a point of inescapable significance or evaporate. Become what Walter Marshall Horton described as "*the inner core of vital sanctity in the church*". By "church" apply the true translation of the Greek word "*ecclesia*" and dismiss the traditional understanding of organized religion, which the word church has come to mean. The "*ecclesia*" is those separated from among the congregation for the purposes of God. An "*ecclesia*" is from "ek" in the Greek, "out of" and "klesis" meaning "a calling". The Old Testament prophetic equivalent is remnant that which is left after a part has been removed, the remainder.

In that sense, “Oh how I long to be left behind”! You and I need to become the “church” in the real meaning of the term “*ecclesia*”, an assembly “called out” to discuss something specific apart from the main body, summoned for a definite purpose. The “*ecclesia*” must answer the call of the Lord and join others in the earth, to preach the gospel of the Kingdom.

Horton says it so well, “*The visible church in it’s ‘spotted actuality’ is not the Kingdom of Christ. Only the inner core of vital sanctity in the church (the ecclesia), the ‘una sancta ecclesia Dei’, answers to that description*”. You and I need to be the *ecclesia* the precious inner core of vital sanctity and preach the message of Jesus.

“And this Gospel of the Kingdom will be preached in the whole world as a testimony to all nations, and then the end will come”. — Jesus; Matthew 24.14

The dream of Jesus Christ is the Kingdom of God, and the committed Christian buys into his dream — Brennan Manning, A Glimpse of Jesus

Our Father...your Kingdom come, your will be done on earth as it is in heaven”
— Matthew 6:10

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— **References** — **Scriptures:** Hebrews 1:1-2; Colossians 1:15-17; 2:15; Matthew 5:17-20; Luke 4:43; I Peter 1:10-12; Matthew 23:23; John 1:1-2, 10-11,14, 16-17; John 5:39-40; Matthew 18:20/ **Sources:** Thayer’s Greek English Lexicon the New Testament Zondervon Publishing pg 380 / Theological Dictionary of the New Testament – Geoffrey W. Bromiley / Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing ©1985 pg 505-508. / **Quotes:** Alfred Firmin Loisy The Gospel and the Church 1902, The Pope’s First Jesus Book by Ben Witherington, Human, Holy and Divine—reflections on modern Christology—Coutts Memorial lecture Sydney and Brisbane 2011, Jesus Before Christianity — Albert Nolan © 1976 Orbis Books pg 5, The Signature of Jesus — Brennan Manning /©1988 Multnomah Publishers pg 171, A Glimpse of Jesus — Brennan Manning/©2003 Harper Collins pg 104.