

# The Gospel before the Crucifixion

## 1. Introduction

Before the crucifixion, throughout his ministry, Jesus proclaimed the Gospel (GK: euangellion = good news, from which we get the term “evangelical”). He defined the Gospel as follows: “The Kingdom of God has come” and called all people to turn toward it (“Repent”) as the way to salvation. Thousands experienced God’s presence and came to believe in God through his preaching before the crucifixion.

### **Mark 1:15**

The time promised by God has come at last. The Kingdom of God has come. Repent and believe the Gospel.

### **Matthew 3:2 (John the Baptist);**

Repent, for the Kingdom of Heaven has come near.

### **Matthew 4:17 (Jesus)**

Repent for the Kingdom of Heaven has come

### **Matthew 4:23**

Jesus went throughout Galilee, teaching in their synagogues, preaching the gospel of the kingdom, healing every disease and sickness among the people

### **Matthew 6:10 (the Lord’s Prayer)**

Your kingdom come, your will be done, on earth as it is in heaven.

### **Luke 17:20**

Once, on being asked by the Pharisees when the kingdom of God would come, Jesus replied, “The coming of the kingdom of God is not something that can be observed, nor will people say, ‘Here it is,’ or ‘There it is,’ because the kingdom of God is within you

In this lesson we will address the following questions:

- What is the Kingdom of God?
- Wasn’t God always here in the world? Why does God have to come?
- Why is this idea central to salvation?
- What is the relationship of the crucifixion and resurrection of Jesus to his preaching about the Kingdom of God?

- How does the idea of substitutionary atonement (i.e., “Jesus died for my sins”) relate to the concept of the Kingdom of God?
- Why is this important to us in our daily walk with God?

## **2. What is the Kingdom of God?**

In the first century the term “Kingdom” (basileia), referred to the realm over which the king ruled. It was the primary term used to describe the Roman Imperial rule of the Caesars over the Roman Empire, a rule that was characterized by domination and exploitation. Jesus’ proclamation of God’s Kingdom was set in stark contrast to Roman rule. It was one in which there would no longer be domination or victimization, but power characterized by love, acceptance and empowerment, where evil in all its forms would be overcome or cast out. This power was not defined or limited by borders, but was present within all humanity (“The Kingdom of God is within you,” Luke 17:20), and therefore could not be controlled by any outside authority. Jesus message was, “Repent,” turn away from every other way of defining yourself, “the presence and love of God, God’s power is here for you.” He showed that this was true in the way he lived and interacted with people. Those who experienced it were transformed and called this message it “Good News,” from which we get the term “Gospel.” This redefinition of the Kingdom was fundamentally posed as a political threat to the Roman Imperial political system, which led to Jesus’ crucifixion.

Therefore, the Kingdom of God, refers to God’s saving power over all Creation, that is coming into the world through the preaching and ministry and Jesus and his disciples. It is the authoritative power and empowerment of God within us, as individuals and as a community of faith that brings abundant and eternal life.

## **3. Wasn’t God Already in the World? Why did God need to come into the world?**

In the first century there was a common belief that God had, for a period of time, given over the inhabited world (authority over the affairs of humans) to Satan. For Jesus, the absence of God was to be seen both in Roman rule, and primarily in the distortions of Pharisaic religion, which resulted in the exclusion of people from God’s love.

### **Luke 4:5**

Then the devil, taking Him up on a high mountain, showed Him all the kingdoms of the world in a moment of time. 6 And the devil said to Him, “All this authority I will give You, and their glory; for this has been delivered to me, and I give it to whomever I wish. 7 Therefore, if You will worship before me, all will be Yours.”

### **Qumran: The Melchizedek Fragment**

Satan is an angel who is defeated by God in a war in heaven. As a punishment he is cast out of heaven and comes to earth (oikumene, same word as in the temptation story), where he wreaks havoc. God sends Melchizedek to earth to tell humanity that Satan rule

is over and God is not present to give life (Isaiah 51-1-2, the spirit of the Lord is upon me . . .”

*Clearly Jesus knows this story:*

### **Luke 10:9-20**

Heal the sick who are there and tell them, ‘The kingdom of God has come near to you.’ But when you enter a town and are not welcomed, go into its streets and say, ‘Even the dust of your town we wipe from our feet as a warning to you. Yet be sure of this: The kingdom of God has come near.’ I tell you, it will be more bearable on that day for Sodom than for that town.

The seventy-two returned with joy and said, “Lord, even the demons submit to us in your name.”

He replied, “I saw Satan fall like lightning from heaven.”

Jesus knows that in proclaiming the Kingdom of God he fulfills the role of Melchizedek

### **Luke 4:16-21**

<sup>1</sup>When he came to Nazareth, where he had been brought up, he went to the synagogue on the sabbath day, as was his custom. He stood up to read, and the scroll of the prophet Isaiah was given to him. He unrolled the scroll and found the place where it was written:

“The Spirit of the Lord is upon me,  
because he has anointed me  
to bring good news to the poor.  
He has sent me to proclaim release to the captives  
and recovery of sight to the blind,  
to let the oppressed go free,  
to proclaim the year of the Lord’s favor.”

And he rolled up the scroll, gave it back to the attendant, and sat down. The eyes of all in the synagogue were fixed on him. <sup>21</sup> Then he began to say to them, “Today this scripture has been fulfilled in your hearing.”

## **4. Why is the Coming of the Kingdom at the root of salvation?**

Everything depends on God, the author and perfecter of our salvation. What saves us day by day is the love of God, perpetually there in us and all around us. What condemns is our own inability to take into our lives what is already ours, constantly completely there for us.

According to Jesus, God has made a sovereign choice to come into the world and into our hearts with God’s power and love. Jesus came to proclaim this and demonstrated this reality through

his ministry. There is nothing we can do to earn this, there is nothing we can do to lose it. Our ability to live an abundant life and to experience that life eternally depends solely on faith, on turning away (“repentance”) from all other “authorities” on the basis of which we might define ourselves and relying solely on the presence of God within us. The presence of God has come now to all the world (the Spirit comes into the world with Jesus’s baptism, Luke 3:21; God’s Spirit comes down on the Jews at Pentecost, Acts 2:1-31; God’s Spirit comes down upon the Gentiles, Acts 10:44-46). Anyone who believes this, experiences the salvation that comes to us in God’s presence.

## **5. What is the relationship of the crucifixion and resurrection to Jesus proclamation of the coming of the Kingdom of God.**

Throughout the Gospels and Acts the crucifixion is understood as the rejection of Jesus’s proclamation by those who had their own “Kingdoms” or authorities to defend and sustain (Mark 12:10; Matthew 21:41; Luke 17:25; John 1:1; 5:43; 12:48)

**The Crucifixion** is therefore history’s disconfirmation of Jesus and his message the God’s Kingdom had come. The sign of this cross “This is the King of the Jews” indicates Rome’s thinking that with the death of Jesus they are putting to rest the idea that the Kingdom of God had come. Acts 2:36 tells us that they Jews were complicit in this rejection.

**The Resurrection** is then God’s confirmation that what Jesus said and did was right. “Let the whole house of Israel know, this Jesus whom you crucified, **God has made both Christ and Lord!**” (Acts 2:36). What was on the sign has now become true.

### ***Peter’s First Sermon***

“Fellow Israelites, I may say to you confidently of our ancestor David that he both died and was buried, and his tomb is with us to this day. But this Jesus, God raised up, and of that all of us are witnesses. Therefore, let the entire house of Israel know with certainty that God has made him both Lord and Messiah, this Jesus whom you crucified.”

## **6. Substitutionary Atonement (an alternative, biblical and valid interpretation of the Cross)**

Isaiah 53:1-12

He was despised and rejected by men; a man of sorrows, and acquainted with grief; and as one from whom men hide their faces he was despised, and we esteemed him not. *Surely, he has borne our griefs and carried our sorrows; yet we esteemed him stricken, smitten by God, and afflicted. But he was wounded for our transgressions; he was crushed for our iniquities; upon him was the chastisement that brought us peace, and with his stripes we are healed.* All we like sheep have gone astray; we have turned—every one—to his own way; and *the LORD has laid on him the iniquity of us all.* He was oppressed, and he was afflicted, yet he opened not his mouth; like a lamb that is led to the slaughter, and like a sheep that before its shearers is silent, so he opened not his mouth. By oppression and judgment, he was taken away; and as for his generation, who

considered that he was cut off out of the land of the living, stricken for the transgression of my people? And they made his grave with the wicked and with a rich man in his death, although he had done no violence, and there was no deceit in his mouth. Yet it was the will of the LORD to crush him; he has put him to grief; when his soul makes an offering for guilt, he shall see his offspring; he shall prolong his days; the will of the LORD shall prosper in his hand. Out of the anguish of his soul he shall see and be satisfied; by his knowledge shall the righteous one, my servant, make many to be accounted righteous, and he shall bear their iniquities. Therefore, I will divide him a portion with the many, and he shall divide the spoil with the strong, because he poured out his soul to death and was numbered with the transgressors; yet he bore the sin of many, and makes intercession for the transgressors.

2 Corinthians 2:21

For our sake he made him to be sin who knew no sin, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God.

Galatians 3:10-13

All who rely on works of the law are under a curse; for it is written, 'Cursed be everyone who does not abide by all things written in the book of the law, and do them.' [...] Christ redeemed us from the curse of the law, having become a curse for us—for it is written, 'Cursed be everyone who hangs on a tree.'

1 Peter 2:24

He himself bore our sins in his body on the tree, that we might die to sin and live to righteousness.

1 Peter 3:18

For Christ also died for sins once for all, the righteous for the unrighteous, that he might bring us to God.

Romans 5:11

11 And not only so, but we also joy in God through our Lord Jesus Christ, by whom we have now received the atonement.

Hebrews 9:11-28

But when Christ came as a high priest of the good things that have come, then through the greater and perfect tent (not made with hands, that is, not of this creation), he entered once for all into the Holy Place, not with the blood of goats and calves, but with his own blood, thus obtaining eternal redemption. For if the blood of goats and bulls, with the sprinkling of the ashes of a heifer, sanctifies those who have been defiled so that their flesh is purified, how much more will the blood of Christ, who through the eternal Spirit

offered himself without blemish to God, purify our conscience from dead works to worship the living God!

Matthew 20:28

Just as the Son of Man came not to be served but to serve, and to give his life a ransom (*but a ransom is not strictly atonement/sacrifice, it is a payment*) for many.

The idea that Jesus came to be a sacrifice for us and that our experience of God's presence in our lives is directly dependent on this sacrifice, is stated in the Bible, was developed into doctrine by the early Church Fathers and became the principle doctrine of the Catholic Church, due primarily to their adherence to the teachings of Peter, who is the primary proponent of this idea in the Bible and early church. Thus, in the Catholic Church, Jesus is portrayed as still on the cross.

This view can be harmonized with the Gospels portrayal of the preaching and ministry of Jesus by stating that God's decision to come into the world was based on God's foreknowledge of the sacrificial death of Jesus: God came powerfully into the world because he knew that Jesus would pay the price for our sins.

*Nevertheless, many biblical scholars would maintain that in the early church, different Jewish traditions were used to explain the meaning of Jesus' life and death, that these traditions existed side by side, that the early Christian saw no need to harmonize these into a systematic theology, and that such harmonization took place later in the history of the church.*

## **7. Conclusion: Why does this matter?**

For me, it focuses me on the fact that my ability to live a Christian life depends on what Jesus said: God is present in us. Turn away (or repent) from all other ways of determining your value, depend on this love, use the power of this love to confront the challenges of this life, see God's presence in the lives of all those around you and therefore treat them with love, and spread the good news that this love is available to everyone you meet.

It also focuses my prayer life: "Father, who art in heaven, hallowed be thy name. Thy kingdom come . . ."

Therefore, for me, the most important verse in the New Testament and a New Year's Resolution(!) for all us is this:

Jude 1:21

**"Keep yourself in the love of God."**

For us, since the Kingdom of God has come, and God's power and love is completely available to us all, everything depends on keeping ourselves in this love.