

THE GOOD NEWS OF THE KINGDOM

After Jesus of Nazareth was immersed in the Jordan River, He began to collect some followers. Jesus chose twelve men to be the ones nearest to Him whom Jesus would later send around the country with the same Good News that He was preaching. What was that "good news" Jesus was preaching? Jesus' apostle Matthew calls it "the gospel of the Kingdom." (Matthew 4:25) Since the word "gospel" literally means "good news", what was so "good" about hearing the news about a Kingdom? Did that "good news" make any difference in the lives of those who heard it?

Hello I'm Larry Murdock. I preach for the Gandy church of Christ.

Evidently, most of the people who heard Jesus preach thought that His preaching was indeed "good news." Jesus was thronged with huge crowds of people everywhere He went. Of course, the people heard about the miracles Jesus did. But when they came to see the miracles or to receive healing for themselves they also heard the preaching, the "good news of the Kingdom." While he healed people, Jesus was also preaching.

The "news" Jesus was spreading was more important than His healing! That's right! Jesus' healing would last people only a short time until they died; but Jesus' teaching would last for eternity! Jesus raised a friend of his from the dead. Lazarus had been dead for four days and was buried in a cave. Jesus raised Lazarus from the dead! But in the flesh even Lazarus could not live forever. He had to die again! And even today, Jesus' miracles are no longer with us, but the "good news" of the Kingdom is **still** changing people's lives. Jesus said "**Heaven and earth will pass away, but my words will never pass away.**" (Matthew 24:35) Jesus' good news will last for eternity because it is **about** eternity!

The good news of the Kingdom was indeed "good news" because that news was about **both** living here on the earth and living beyond the earth, living forever. The next life will happen in what Jesus called "the world to come." A fisherman by the name of Peter was one of the men whom Jesus had chosen to follow Him. Peter told Jesus one day, "See, we have left everything and followed you." Jesus replied, "**Truly, I say to you, there is no one who has left house or brothers or**

sisters or mother or father or children or lands, for my sake and for the gospel, who will not receive a hundredfold now in this time, houses and brothers and sisters and mothers and children and lands, with persecutions, and in the [world, KJV] to come eternal life." (Mark 10:28-30 ESV) The good news Jesus preached brings together people into an eternal kingdom where Jesus is the King. Jesus' kingdom is a group of people who believe and obey Jesus and His message. Jesus promised that when Peter left his mother to follow Jesus Peter would enter a kingdom with a multitude of spiritual mothers. When Peter left his brothers and sisters for the kingdom he would gain a family of faith with a multitude of spiritual brothers and sisters. Even houses and lands would be shared in this new community called the kingdom of Christ. In fact, later when the promised "kingdom" came and the church community was established we read that "The full number of those who believed was of one heart and soul, and no one said that any of the things that belonged to him was his own, but they had everything in common." (Acts 4:32 ESV)

As a side note, notice that while Peter would gain a multitude of mothers, fathers, brothers and sisters. He would not gain wives! Peter had one wife and that's all that He would have. And if Peter's wife was saved and added to the church of Christ, then she too would have a multitude of mothers, fathers, brothers, and sisters, but only one husband. Many years after the church of Christ was established Jesus' apostle Paul wrote this to a young preacher, "Do not rebuke an older man but encourage him as you would a father, younger men as brothers, older women as mothers, younger women as sisters, in all purity." (1 Timothy 5:1-2 ESV)

So Jesus came to build a spiritual community of obedient believers who would behave like a family. That group was called Jesus' Kingdom and in its many locations it was also called the churches of Christ. These followers of Jesus were also called the household of God, that is, God's family. This spiritual kingdom in this world (with persecution) was and is an important piece of the "good news" Jesus was preaching. But just as important was the good news about living forever in "the world to come." The greatest characteristic of the eternal "world to come" is eternal life! That's right! Never dying, no sickness, no affliction, no pain, no persecution.

The "world to come" is also called the "kingdom of heaven" and it exists without these earthly difficulties. Jesus' "kingdom teaching" dealt with the behavior of people in **this** world, but the earthly behavior Jesus commanded was in view of the end result, eternal life. Jesus' "kingdom teaching" directed people to live as Jesus taught us to live so that we can live forever with the Lord. Behavior in this world has something to do with living forever in the "world to come."

And so Jesus taught us to be "poor in spirit"; to mourn our sins, to be meek, gentle toward everyone. He taught us to hunger and thirst after righteousness and to be merciful toward others. Jesus taught us to be pure in heart, free of wicked ulterior motives. He taught us to seek peace with everyone, but withstand the persecution that the wicked One would stir up. Jesus said his people would be the salt of the earth and a light on a hill that could not be ignored. Jesus taught us that our righteousness must start from our hearts and issue forth in our actions. Not vice versa where we act righteously but inwardly are rotten. He taught us to love our enemies and pray for those who persecute us. The great reward in heaven awaits Jesus' people who love the ones that hate Jesus and His people! (Matthew 5:46-48) Jesus taught us to love God with all our heart, soul, mind, and strength, and our neighbor as ourselves. These are just some of the things Jesus taught us about living on earth in view of eternity.

Jesus' apostle Paul also wrote about living on earth in view of eternity. Paul wrote, "...We are always confident and know that as long as we are at home in the body we are **away** from the Lord. For we live by faith, not by sight. We are confident, I say, and would prefer to be **away** from the body and, at home with the Lord. So we make it our goal to please him, whether we are at home in the body or away from it. For we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ, so that each of us may receive what is due us for the things done while in the body, whether good or bad." (2 Corinthians 5:6-10 NIV) This passage refers to a "home with the Lord". That "home" is located in the "world to come" and is in the future to those who are still in the flesh. Christians are spiritually in the kingdom of Christ while living in this world. We are now "away" from the Lord, but there is coming a day when Christians will enter the "home of the Lord." The day Christians can go home to the Lord is the day of their death. That's right!

The apostle Paul wrote about his going to be with the Lord. Paul was in Rome and a prisoner of the Roman government. But Paul had an intuition that he

would be released, but just in case he was wrong he wrote this to his friends in the city of Philippi. "... I know that through your prayers and God's provision of the Spirit of Jesus Christ what has happened to me will turn out for my deliverance. I eagerly expect and hope that I will in no way be ashamed, but will have sufficient courage so that now as always Christ will be exalted in my body, whether by life or by death. For to me, to live is Christ and to die is gain. If I am to go on living in the body, this will mean fruitful labor for me. Yet what shall I choose? I do not know! I am torn between the two: I desire to depart and be with Christ, which is better by far; but it is more necessary for you that I remain in the body." (Philippians 1:19-24 NIV)

Evidently the apostle Paul was eventually released from his imprisonment. Bible students think that he was free for a couple of years but then rearrested and taken again to Rome. This time it appears that Paul died by the persecution of Emperor Nero. Shortly before Paul's death he wrote his last letter to his brother-in-Christ, Timothy. In the last chapter of that letter we read what Paul wrote, "I am already being poured out like a drink offering, and the time for my departure is near. I have fought the good fight, I have finished the race, I have kept the faith. Now there is in store for me the crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous Judge, will award to me on that day--and not only to me, but also to all who have longed for his appearing." (2 Timothy 4:6-8 NIV)

Let me ask you this: do you look forward to your death? Will you depart to be with the Lord and live with Him in the "world to come"? Jesus Christ is the King of His spiritual Kingdom, the Church of Christ. Jesus is the Ruler who is my Lord. He can also be your Lord. When Jesus' "good news of the kingdom" is preached Jesus issues a call to the whole world. He says, "All things have been committed to me by my Father. No one knows the Son except the Father, and no one knows the Father except the Son and those to whom the Son chooses to reveal him. "Come to me, all you who are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you and learn from me, for I am gentle and humble in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. For my yoke is easy and my burden is light." (Matthew 11:27-30) Do you want to come to Jesus? When sinners asked Jesus' apostle what they needed to do, Peter commanded, "Repent and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of sins and you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit." (Acts 2:38) Is the "good news of the Kingdom" good news to you?