



Part 11: The Gospel of the Kingdom – Promises Kept Matthew 4:12-17

The gospel is the good news that God has kept His promises to Israel to rescue and renew His groaning creation from Satan, sin, and death through King Jesus (his life, death, resurrection, and ascension). Life in God’s beautiful Kingdom is available now and forever to all who entrust themselves to King Jesus and follow him as Lord.

I. Ordinary Christianity

For the first two centuries of the Church, Christians automatically turned to Matthew’s gospel for the essential content for the teaching about Jesus (RT France, 7).

Matthew was cited by the early church fathers more than twice as often as the other Gospels probably because Matthew arranged Jesus’ teaching in five blocks (Fee, *How to Read the Bible*, 269).

“...it was Matthew’s gospel which created the climate of ordinary Christianity.” – R.T. France, *Matthew, Evangelist & Teacher*, 20.

A closer look at the Gospels and Acts reveals that Jesus and the Apostles expressed the gospel (good news) very differently than what most of us have heard.

The Christian gospel is like a beautiful diamond that has many facets to it. Put most simply, we could say Jesus is the gospel. When we hold up Jesus in the light of God's grace, we see many different truths that together make up the beauty of the gospel.

II. The Gospel of the Kingdom

A. The Gospel of Modern Evangelicalism

Question: If you should die tonight, how do you know you would go to heaven? (Evangelism Explosion) Evangelism tools include the bridge diagram (cross bridging hell to heaven).

The Christian gospel is presented as the minimum entrance requirement to getting into heaven when you die? The gospel is reduced to forgiveness of sins to get us into heaven when we die (evangelism = getting souls into heaven).

"Saving faith becomes the minimum amount you have to believe so that, if you believe it, God has to let you into heaven. Other beliefs are optional as far as salvation is concerned." – John Ortberg, *Eternity is Now in Session*, 34

B. The Gospel According to the Early Church

Our four Gospels (Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John) were circulated with the title – "The Gospel According to Matthew ..." They understood there to be one gospel written in four versions. The Gospels are the gospel.

"...the gospel is the story of Jesus of Nazareth told as the climax of the long story of Israel, which in turn is the story of how the one true God is rescuing the world." – N.T. Wright (quoted by Scott McKnight, *The King Jesus Gospel*)

C. Promises Kept: Jesus is the Climax of Israel's Story

We've noted already how Matthew sees Jesus as the fulfillment of God's promises to Israel. Here we see that Matthew connects Jesus to God's promise made through Isaiah (a famous prophecy of the Messiah).

"Land of Zebulun and land of Naphtali, the way of the sea, along the Jordan, Galilee of the Gentiles – the people living in darkness have seen a great light; on those living in the land of the shadow of death a light has dawned." Matthew 4:15-16 (alluding to Isaiah 9:1-2)

"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 Counselor, 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 forever. The zeal of the Lord Almighty will accomplish this." Isaiah 9:6-7

Matthew is telling us that God's promises of his anointed King, in the line of King David, have now come true in Jesus of Nazareth. Jesus is God's King bringing God's Kingdom on earth as it is in heaven.

"How beautiful on the mountains are the feet of those who bring good news (gospel), who proclaim peace, who bring good tidings, who proclaim salvation, who say to Zion, 'Your God reigns!'" Isaiah 52:7

The Lord made promises to Israel that He would one Day send His anointed King (Messiah/Christ) to rescue and renew His groaning creation and fully establish his Kingdom on earth as in heaven (See Isaiah 40:3-5, 9-10).

"Behold, I will create new heavens and a new earth. The former things will not be remembered, nor will they come
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to mind.” Isaiah 65:17

“We know that the whole creation has been groaning as in the pains of childbirth right up to the present time. Not only so, but we who have the first fruits of the Spirit, groan inwardly as we wait eagerly for our adoption as sons, the redemption of our bodies. For in this hope we are saved.” Romans 8:22-24a

“Then I saw a new heaven and a new earth, for the first heaven and the first earth had passed away...He who was seated on the throne said, ‘I am making all things new!’” Revelation 21:1, 5

“Christianity is all about the belief that the living God, in fulfillment of his promises and as the climax of the story of Israel, has accomplished all this – the finding, the saving, the giving of new life – in Jesus. He has done it. With Jesus, God’s rescue operation has been put into effect once and for all. A great door has swung open in the cosmos which can never again be shut. It’s the door to the prison where we’ve been kept chained up. We are offered freedom: freedom to experience God’s rescue for ourselves, to go through the open door and explore the new world to which we now have access. In particular, we are all invited – summoned, actually – to discover, through following Jesus, that this new world is indeed a place of justice, spirituality, relationship, and beauty, and that we are not only to enjoy it as such but to work bringing it to birth on earth as in heaven. In listening to Jesus, we discover whose voice it is that has echoed around the hearts and minds of the human race all along.” – N.T. Wright, *Simply Christian*, 92

III. Our Story, Our Gospel

The gospel is the good news that God has kept His promises to Israel to rescue and renew His groaning creation from Satan, sin, and death through King Jesus (his life, death, resurrection, and ascension). Life in God’s

beautiful Kingdom is available now and forever to all who entrust themselves to King Jesus and follow him as Lord.

As disciples of Jesus, we are people of God's Story and gospel.

“There is something particularly sad about it. Something that doesn't have very much to do with physical circumstances or the economy or any of the stuff that gets talked about in the news. It's more like a stomach level sadness. I see it in myself and my friends in different ways. It manifests itself as a kind of lostness. The sadness is a real American kind of sadness. I am white, upper middle class, obscenely well educated, have had more career success than I could legitimately hope for and was sort of adrift. A lot of my friends were the same way. Some of them were deeply into drugs, others were unbelievable workaholics. Some were going to singles bars every night. You could see it played out in twenty different ways, but it's the same thing. I get the feeling that a lot of us privileged Americans, as we enter our early thirties, have to find a way to put away childish things and confront stuff about spirituality.” – David Foster Wallace, novelist and social critic (interviewed before his suicide @ 46)

“...the people living in darkness have seen a great light; on those living in the land of the shadow of death a light has dawned.” Matthew 4:16 (quoting Isaiah 9)

Discussion Questions:

1. How was the Christian gospel explained to you?
2. Read Matthew 4:12-17 and Isaiah 9:1-7. What is Matthew telling us about Jesus of Nazareth? What is he telling us about God's promises to Israel? How do the quotes by N.T. Wright offer some perspective?

3. The early Church understood the four Gospels of Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John as expressing *the gospel*. How does this help or challenge your understanding of the gospel? What might this say about the importance of Jesus' ministry in addition to his cross and resurrection?
4. Doug has proposed his definition of the gospel (above). What questions does this raise for you? Do you find it confusing or helpful?
5. What are our modern, secular "gospels"?

Recommended reading:

1. *Eternity is Now in Session* by John Ortberg
2. *Simply Christian* by N.T. Wright
3. *The King Jesus Gospel* by Scott McKnight