

Focus on the Kingdom

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What Must I Do to Be Saved?

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What must I do to be saved is the critical, foundational question in Christianity today. Yet many Christians are unable to articulate the Gospel^[1] and when they do they give different and contradictory answers to this question. They also disagree with Jesus himself! Our nation is bombarded with evangelical tracts. They provide a succinct paragraph on the back page, telling the reader how to be assured of entrance “into heaven” at the moment of death. Focusing primarily on the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ, these tracts as well as their corresponding internet sites ask you to “accept the free gift of salvation and do nothing more,” as requirements for eternal salvation. After a brief sinners prayer, they usually leave you with no further direction than “Congratulations and welcome to the family of God.”^[2]

This is the unfortunate reality of the Lord's church in the twenty-first century. Would Jesus recognize as authentic these popular messages claiming to be his very gospel message? Would Jesus help print these widely distributed tracts? Would Jesus be leading a “get saved” meeting on a particular night of the week? Did Jesus ever offer “heaven at death” to anyone?

Not only did Jesus and his followers preach a much fuller Gospel message than the one found in most of the churches today, they also demanded more of their new converts. Jesus himself announced his Gospel-mission statement as the model for Christian preaching. He said that he was sent for the very purpose of preaching **the Gospel of the “Kingdom of God”** (see Luke 4:43). He sent out his disciples to announce this very same message *even before they understood anything about his death and resurrection.*^[3] Years later we see Paul, with a clear understanding of all Jesus had done and was going to do, staying “two full years in his own rented quarters,” and “was welcoming all who came to him, preaching the kingdom of God and teaching about the Lord Jesus Christ quite openly and unhindered” (Acts 28:30-31). In the light of these clear and consistent definitions of the saving Gospel, it is amazing that the church's tracts never speak of this “Gospel about the Kingdom of God.”

Unfortunately even when commentators and preachers have begun to see the importance of this Kingdom of God message, they dismiss it by telling us that it has been replaced by a “gospel of grace.” They argue that the Kingdom Gospel was specifically for the Jews of Jesus' time,^[4] and not for us today! The testimony of Scripture loudly proclaims that this could not be so (Acts 20:24-25). The challenge facing modern Bereans is that of recapturing the Gospel words of Christ and making them our source for calling out sinners from this present evil age. After all, the sheep hear the genuine voice of Jesus (John 10:3-4, 16, 27).

Certainly the sacrifice of Jesus the Christ pays for the sin of mankind and grants us access to God and life in the coming age. Without it no one could look for entrance into God's Kingdom.

But this work of Jesus on the cross alone does not constitute the *whole* gospel message. What is the point of accepting Jesus' sacrifice on the cross if we do not repent by obeying his Gospel command to *believe the Gospel of the Kingdom* (Mark 1:14, 15; 4:11, 12)?

God is restoring what He originally intended for the world, a time when all that is wrong with the present evil system will be made right and sin will be destroyed. This is the foundation of the salvation message of the Kingdom, to which all of Scripture testifies and which all of creation eagerly awaits. To obey Jesus, which is essential for salvation (Heb. 5:9), why not obey his first command: "Repent and believe the Gospel of the Kingdom" (see Mark 1:14, 15)?✧