

God's Solution to Human Problems

THE great theme of the Bible is 'the Kingdom of God'. But what does this mean?

The very first book of the Bible, Genesis, tells us about God's purpose in creation, and mankind's place in it:

God created man in His own image; in the image of God He created him; male and female He created them (Genesis 1:27).

In other words, men and women living on the earth were to reflect the very characteristics of God.

These qualities are summed up in a dramatic revelation to Moses, two thousand years later, when God showed Moses His glory and said:

The LORD, the LORD God, merciful and gracious, longsuffering, and abounding in goodness and truth, keeping mercy for thousands, forgiving iniquity and transgression and sin, by no means clearing the guilty (Exodus 34:6-7).

The Need for Change

The more we reflect on them, the more we can see these characteristics are needed in our world. In our personal relationships we need to adjust to each other's needs and to behave in ways that bring no sadness and



regrets. In social interactions, such qualities would transform the way communities function. International relations would be transformed if they were upheld. They even have an application to the way we treat our natural environment.

If leaders at every level upheld these values, think of the massive difference it would make. People are too often motivated by greed and the desire for power. The result is conflict and selfish behaviours designed to assert personal, institutional, racial or national supremacy. The Bible sums up this human tendency as 'sin'.

Just take a look at the news and you can see how close to the truth this is – in politics, business, family life, sport, culture – in fact in any sphere of human activity. But, by contrast, where good things are happening

– and they do happen – we can usually see elements of the qualities of God’s glory finding expression.

The Kingdom of God is about a world in which this ‘glory of God’ ultimately fills the earth. The Bible assures us it will happen.

Clearly, there has to be change. The starting point for this is the desire for change, the recognition that something needs to be done if the world is to survive as a place where beauty prevails over ugliness, where ‘the glory of God’ prevails.

Jesus’ First Coming

The gospel message is that change can and will happen. ‘Gospel’ means ‘good news’ – or ‘Glad Tidings’. At the centre of this good news is the Lord Jesus Christ. In his own life he embodied the change that can happen. He gives hope to those who commit their lives to him.

that so often drive us, and showed ‘the glory of God’ in his character and actions, reaching out to meet the needs of people from all backgrounds.

The supreme action of his life was, paradoxically, his death. It came about because of all that is wrong with human nature, bringing about a totally unjust trial, followed by the suffering that ended in his crucifixion. Immediately before this happened, Jesus said:

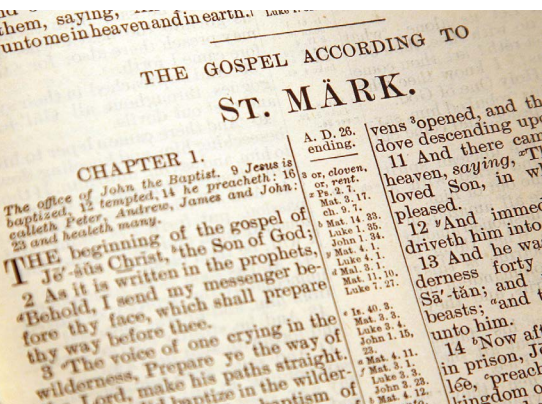
Greater love has no one than this, than to lay down one’s life for his friends. You are my friends if you do whatever I command you (John 15:13–14).

In other words, he allowed himself to be arrested and abused and to be nailed to a cross to show the enormity of sin, and to demonstrate to the world that sin leads to death.

But at the same time, his was an act of love. For no one can show greater love than to lay down their life for others. The love that brought him to death was also the love that had conquered sin. He never gave way to its impulses, or to the temptations that confronted him.

For this reason, God, Who is altogether holy and just, raised him to life again after three days of lying dead in a cold, sealed and guarded tomb. The apostle Peter put it like this:

Him (Jesus), being delivered by the determined purpose and foreknowledge of God, you have taken by lawless hands, have crucified, and put



Because of his unique relationship with God, Jesus conquered the selfish impulses

to death; whom God raised up, having loosed the pains of death, because it was not possible that he should be held by it (Acts 2:23–24).

There was no doubt about his death and there was no doubt about the reality of his resurrection. For 40 days he appeared in various situations to a whole variety of people.

He then met with his disciples and gave them instructions to go into all the world and preach the good news that his resurrection had confirmed. God's purpose in creation was sure. Whereas the first man (Adam) had failed to obey God and show His glory, Jesus had succeeded. He had conquered sin, once and for all. From now on, all who learnt the lessons of his life and death and declared their belief in all that it stood for, could live a new life 'in him'.

The Second Coming

But there was more to it than simply living life now. When Jesus ascended into heaven as his disciples watched, two angels appeared to them and gave this message.

Men of Galilee, why do you stand gazing up into heaven? This same Jesus, who was taken up from you into heaven, will so come in like manner as you saw him go into heaven (Acts 1:11).

Thus assured that he would return to the earth, the Second Coming of Jesus became the central hope of believers.

A few years later the apostle Paul summed it up in this way:

Christ is risen from the dead, and has become the firstfruits of those who have fallen asleep. For since by man came death, by man also came the resurrection of the dead. For as in Adam all die, even so in Christ all shall be made alive. But each one in his own order: Christ the firstfruits, afterward those who are Christ's at his coming. Then comes the end, when he delivers the kingdom to God the Father, when he puts an end to all rule and all authority and power. For he must reign till he has put all enemies under his feet. The last enemy that will be destroyed is death (1 Corinthians 15:20–26).

Christ 'the firstfruits' – the first man to be raised to life for evermore. Then 'at his coming' those who belong to Christ. So if we 'belong to Christ' we shall be called to face him at the Judgement, along with all who have come to know him. If we have died, we shall be raised, as he was raised, for the same purpose – to be called to account for how we lived our lives and specifically for our response to the gospel (2 Corinthians 5:10, see also John 5:25–29). Those who are 'in Christ' will be changed into immortal beings like him, destined to be with Christ to accomplish the task that lies ahead.

'For he must reign until he has put all his enemies under his feet.' As the rest of the passage makes clear, this involves ruling the earth and cleansing it of all that opposes the purpose of God. We are back to the overriding theme of the Bible – the Kingdom of God – the state of affairs on the earth when God's laws will prevail, when men and women will live in harmony

with each other under the direction of the Lord Jesus Christ and those who, like him, have become immortal.

What will life be like at this time for the mortal population of the earth? There will be peace (Isaiah 2:4). All people everywhere will have enough food (Psalm 72:16; Amos 9:13, 14). Health problems will be resolved and men and women will live healthy lives in harmony with nature (Isaiah 35). Work will be satisfying and productive (Isaiah 65:21–23). Children will grow up in a safe and healthy environment and old people will be respected and content (Isaiah 65:20; Zechariah 8:4, 5). The earth's resources will no longer be squandered or grabbed to enrich the few, and the rich will no longer have an advantage over the poor (Psalm 72:4, 12–14).

Signs That the Kingdom Is Near

During his lifetime Jesus knew from the Old Testament precisely what would happen to him – his unjust, tortured death. But he also knew he would rise again, ascend to be with his heavenly Father and return again in power and glory to fulfil his ultimate destiny – to establish the Kingdom of God on the earth.

The disciples wanted to know when this would happen. He would not give them a precise time, but made clear that they could expect the situation in the world to be as the prophets in the Old Testament had described:

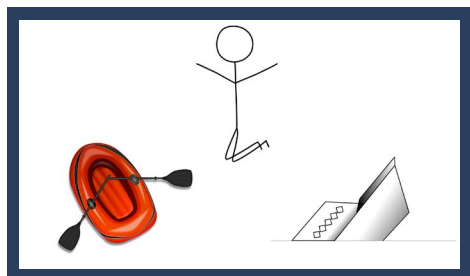
There shall be a time of trouble, such as never was since there was a nation, even to that time (Daniel 12:1).

The world would be full of problems and people would be fearful about the future. But Jesus also gave them assurance:

*There will be signs in the sun, in the moon, and in the stars; and on the earth distress of nations, with perplexity, the sea and the waves roaring; men's hearts failing them from fear and the expectation of those things which are coming on the earth, for the powers of the heavens will be shaken. **Then they will see the Son of Man** coming in a cloud with power and great glory... So you also, when you see these things happening, know that the kingdom of God is near (Luke 21:25–27, 31).*

The Kingdom of God is the solution to all of our problems, and those of the whole world. If we make it the focal point of our lives, we can look forward to it with confidence and excitement.

Michael Owen



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