

The Evangel of the Kingdom

Now after John was put in prison, Jesus came to Galilee, preaching the gospel of the kingdom of God, and saying “The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God is at hand. Repent, and believe the gospel.” (Mark 1:14-15).

Mark, in his summary of the public ministry of our Lord, records these words as the *first* words Jesus spoke after His baptism and Messianic anointing in the form of the Holy Spirit descending upon Him like a dove.¹ Jesus came to Galilee with an announcement, a proclamation of the *evangel* of the kingdom of God.² In the ancient Greek world *evangel* meant, in one of its nuances, “the reward given to a messenger for bringing glad tidings.” When someone brought significant news (for example, of a general’s victory in war), he was given the “gospel”, a reward for the tidings that came with him.³ The *evangel* that Christ announces is the kingdom (or rule) of God. It is good news *foremost* of a King and His kingdom. This message is reflective of a second nuance attached to the ancient use of the word *evangel*; the *evangel* is the proclamation of a savior-king’s enthronement.⁴

Let’s explore this “savior-king enthronement” meaning of *evangel* first before we unpack the meaning of “reward.” According to Christ’s words, in the first century AD the kingdom of God was “at hand.” The best way to understand what “at hand” means is to picture surf an instant before it crashes onto the shore. The time set in the eternal counsels of the triune God had come (see also Galatians 4:4). The season was ripe. God’s orchestrated direction of every minutia of human history was reaching its purposed crescendo. The note for the reverberating peal of the thunderous cymbal of God was one measure away. The enthronement of the true Savior-King had drawn near. Contrary to popular eschatological beliefs prevalent in many quarters of the modern evangelical church,⁵ the *evangel* sets forth Jesus Christ, *not* as a coming King, but as a King who *has come*. According to Scripture, Christ *has* (note the past tense) ascended to His throne and He rules heaven and earth comprehensively, absolutely, and fully (see Daniel 7:13-14; Matthew 26:64; Matthew 28:18, Revelation 1:5; Revelation 5; Psalm 2; Acts 13:33; Acts 2:32-33). Scripture declares that Christ has broken the chains of sin, He has rendered powerless the fearful pangs of death, He reigns in power from heaven, He treads all enemies under His feet during the course of human history, and, at His return in glory, He will destroy death itself (see Colossians 2:13-15; Hebrews 2:14-15; Psalm 110; I Corinthians 15:20-27; Hebrews 1:13; Hebrews 10:13). Contrary to the banal and impotent “gospel” of modern evangelicalism, this is truly *glad tidings*. The *evangel* of the kingdom is a declaration of the power of God unto a *full and complete salvation* to everyone who “repents and believes” (Romans 1:16).⁶

What is the reward associated with the *evangel*? Note that it is Christ Himself who is bringing good news to a sin-rent world. As a messenger, His reward is a gift from His Father. Christ said, “All who the Father gives Me will come to Me, and the one who comes to Me I will by no means cast out” (John 6:37; see also Isaiah 53:10-12 and Hebrews 12:1-2). This reward has a two-fold meaning. Christ, who

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brings the good news, is the One who gives by His grace this gift to all who repent and believe.⁷ Those who receive this gift of grace become Christ's reward, His portion, His spoil, ... *His joy*.⁸

Joy, like reward, also has a double meaning; there is joy in God and joy in His people. In Scripture, God is said to "joy over His covenant people" with singing (see Zephaniah 3:17). In antiquity, no one could come before the throne of a king in mourning. Why would someone be morose in the presence of a monarch in whom all authority and rule consist? Why would someone mope before a potentate who so freely offers grace gifts? If this is true when one stands before an earthly king, *how much more should there be joy in one who stands in grace in the presence of the great King of kings, the blessed and the only Potentate* (I Timothy 6:15)? No wonder Scripture commands us to "make a joyful noise to the Lord ... to serve Him with gladness ... to come before His presence with singing ... to enter His gates with thanksgiving and His courts with the praise" (Psalm 100).

It is this King, a king who was graciously brought salvation to us in the *evangel*, who ordains all things to His predestined ends. It is this King, and only this King, who rules. However much we may be anxious and overwhelmed in this life, we are commanded to approach our King by faith knowing that He will prevail in all things, and *we in Him*.

Rejoice in the Lord always. Again I will say, rejoice! ... Be anxious for nothing, but in everything by prayer and supplication, with thanksgiving, let your requests be made known to God; and the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, will guard your hearts and minds through Christ Jesus (Philippians 4:4, 6).

Yet in all these things we are more than conquerors through Him who loved us (Romans 8:37).

Endnotes:

1 The dove is a significant symbol in that it connects Jesus to Noah (meaning "the giver of rest"). Just as Noah was the progenitor of a "new world" or "new age" so was Jesus. We must remind ourselves that our dating system, a heritage of Christian culture, acknowledges this new reality, the "year of our Lord" (in Latin, *Anno Domini* and abbreviated AD), a concept taken *directly from Scripture* (Luke 4:19).

2 *Evangel* is the English transliteration of the Greek word meaning "glad tidings" or "good news" or, as translated in our English Bibles, "gospel" (a word originating from the Saxon "gode-spell" meaning "good story").

3 See II Samuel 4:10 for an illustrative Old Testament example of "reward for glad tidings."

4 The "glad tidings" concept was always associated with the enthronement or birthday of ancient Kings and Emperors (especially the Roman Caesars).

5 I am speaking of the ideas propagated (1) in the notes of the Schofield Reference Bible (first published in 1909) and (2) by many eschatological pundits parading as "prophecy experts" in the Christian media of today.

6 Repent means "change of mind" and believe means to "commit oneself fully to a person." To believe the *evangel* is to commit oneself fully to Christ, the *evangel* incarnate.

7 The *evangel*, in its classical sense, was *never* considered to be a right earned by the bearer of good news. The authorities always bestowed this reward as a *gift* to the receiver. The Greek word for gift (*charis*) augments this meaning. Our English Bibles translate *charis* as grace. It means "unearned

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favor.” In classical times it was used to describe a birthday gift or any gift that came unearned from the heart of the giver. On the anniversary of the birthday or enthronement of a Roman Emperor, it was customary for him to give his soldiers a “bonus.” A bonus was in contradistinction to the earned wages (or merit) of a soldier; a bonus was a gift freely given and so it was called “the Charis.”

8 In contrast, those who spurn this gift come under the judgment of God (Mark 16:15-16; John 3:36). Even in this judgment, the *evangel* is still glad tidings *in that the judgment of the unrighteous and of injustice must always be seen as good news* (cf. Revelation 19:1-2).