

# The Gospel and the Kingdom of God

Did Jesus Preach the Gospel?

# Introduction

- The classic definition of the gospel is Paul's statement in 1 Cor 15:1-4:
- Now, brothers and sisters, I want to remind you of the **gospel** I preached to you, which you received and on which you have taken your stand. <sup>2</sup> By this **gospel** you are saved, if you hold firmly to the word I preached to you. Otherwise, you have believed in vain. <sup>3</sup> For what I received I passed on to you as of first importance: that Christ died for our sins according to the Scriptures, <sup>4</sup> that he was buried, that he was raised on the third day according to the Scriptures
- Question: if the gospel is what Paul preached, did Jesus ever preach the gospel?

# Introduction

- Some Christian leaders say that Paul preached an individualistic gospel centred on personal salvation
- Jesus preached a corporate vision of life in the Kingdom of God, which is a way of living and being the people of God
- They pit these versions against each other
- Some would go so far as to say that “I don’t believe in the Pauline gospel, but I believe in the Kingdom gospel” (e.g., Brian McLaren)

# Jesus' Preaching on the Kingdom of God

- The earliest record of Jesus' message is Mk 1:15:
- "The time has come," he said. "The kingdom of God has come near. Repent and believe the **good news!**"
- The gospel according to Jesus is that the long-awaited kingdom of God has arrived. This is in fulfilment of God's promise to David:
- "12 When your days are over and you rest with your ancestors, I will raise up your offspring to succeed you, your own flesh and blood, and I will establish his kingdom. 13 He is the one who will build a house for my Name, and I will establish the throne of his kingdom forever" (2 Sam 7:12-13)
- Christians argue that the promise points to Jesus, "the Messiah the son of David, the son of Abraham" (Matt 1:1)

# Reading the Gospel Accounts Backward

- When we read the gospel accounts, we must read the content backward
- The content, structure, and events of the gospel accounts point to the death, burial and resurrection of Jesus
- Jesus says: <sup>20</sup>In the same way, after the supper he took the cup, saying, “This cup is the new covenant in my blood, which is poured out for you (Lu 22:20)
- At the time of this statement, Jesus was saying that he *will* pay for all the benefits of the New Covenant when he dies on the cross

# The Structure of Luke's Gospel

- Luke's structure of his gospel points to the cross:
- Birth narratives (1:5-2:52)
- Preparation for ministry (3:1-4:13)
- Galilean ministry (4:14-9:50)
- Journey toward Jerusalem and Jewish rejection (9:51-19:44)
- Jesus' last days (19:45-24:53)

# Consistency between the KoG and Paul

- There is little difference between the KoG and the gospel
- They both insist that Jesus is the fulfilling Messiah of Israel, who took on human form at his birth
- They both argue that Jesus died on the cross and atoned for our sins
- They both focus on the cross and Jesus' resurrection, such that he overcame the power of evil and death
- They both conclude that Jesus will return to consummate history and to bring about renewal in an everlasting kingdom

# Reading the Bible Backward

- Understanding the gospel—the good news—presupposes a certain way of reading the Bible
- In what sense, if any, is the OT a Christian book or a book about Jesus?
- The OT only became a Christian book when early Christians read it in the light of Jesus' teaching and his death, burial, and resurrection
- In other words, they reinterpreted the OT in light of their experience of Jesus
- The content of NT is based on a fresh understanding of the texts from the OT on the assumption that Jesus fulfilled OT prophecy



# OT Storyline

- We have to learn to read the entire Bible backward in the sense that Jesus fulfilled OT promises
- In the OT the main storyline is the creation of God's people, the Jews, and their relationship with God.
- Thus the concept of "covenant" is important, defining the relationship between God and his chosen people (Gen 17:7; Exod 6:7)
  - Abraham (Gen 12-15)
  - Moses (Ex 20; Deut 8:15-20)
  - David (2 Sam 7:8-16)

# OT Storyline

- In the narrative of the Exodus, God promised through Moses that he would develop several key developments (Deut 18:15-20)
  - God will raise up a future prophet who will lead the people after Moses
  - God will establish a place of worship (tabernacle and the temple) and a sacrificial system to atone for the sin of the people
  - God will provide a king to rule over his people, such as Saul and David
- “<sup>12</sup> When your days are over and you rest with your ancestors, I will raise up your offspring to succeed you, your own flesh and blood, and I will establish his kingdom. <sup>13</sup> He is the one who will build a house for my Name, and I will establish the throne of his kingdom forever” (2 Sam 7:12-13)

# OT Storyline

- God promised David a son for an everlasting kingdom (2 Sam 7:8-16)
- Due to sin, God exiles his people to Babylon
- God renews his covenant (Jer 31:31-34) by raising up a new, righteous king in the line of David (Isa 9:2-7, 11; Eze 34), and by re-establishing the people in their own land
- This hope is called “messianic” because it involves the anointing of a future ruler (Isa 42:1-7; 49:1-7; 50:13-53:12)
- In Isaiah 40-55, the people of Israel are presented as God’s servant with a mission to declare his greatness in the world

# OT Storyline

- Thus, it follows that the OT could hardly be called a book about Jesus, as if he were the principal subject
- Where there is a future hope, it is centred on God himself and on a messianic figure who is not identified
- Jesus is not explicitly mentioned in the OT
- However, the OT bears witness to an ongoing revelation by God and a relationship with humankind
- Thus, there is a continuity in the history of God's dealings, so that the early Christians could view the OT as the story of their own ancestors (Rom 15:4; 1 Cor 10:6)

# OT Storyline

- The fulfilment of Israel's various hopes for the future, centred on the Messiah and the renewal of God's people, are understood to be fulfilled in the experience of the followers of Jesus
- Thus, the OT is seen by the NT writers as the book which looks forward to what was now in the process of fulfilment (Lu 24:46-47)

# Jesus Fulfilled the OT

- In speaking with the disciples on the road to Emmaus:
- <sup>25</sup> “He said to them, ‘How foolish you are, and how slow to believe all that the prophets have spoken! <sup>26</sup> Did not the Messiah have to suffer these things and then enter his glory?’ <sup>27</sup> And beginning with Moses and all the Prophets, he explained to them what was said in all the Scriptures concerning himself” (Lu 24:25-27)

# Christocentric Reading of the OT

- <sup>44</sup>“He said to them, ‘this is what I told you while I was still with you: Everything must be fulfilled that is written about me in the Law of Moses, the Prophets and the Psalms.’ <sup>45</sup> Then he opened their minds so they could understand the Scriptures” (Lu 24:44-45)

# Disciples' Failure to Know Jesus

- Jesus' disciples failed to know him until his resurrection, though Jesus told them four times in Matthew that he would die and rise again
- The disciples had a very narrow view of the kingdom
- Jesus' preaching on the kingdom of God called for an inverted kingdom of humility, far greater in scope than what the Jews had imagined
- The resurrection became the key to reinterpreting the OT (Jn 20:31)



# Jesus Commissions the Disciples

- <sup>46</sup> He told them, “This is what is written: The Messiah will suffer and rise from the dead on the third day, <sup>47</sup> and repentance for the forgiveness of sins will be preached in his name to all nations, beginning at Jerusalem. <sup>48</sup> You are witnesses of these things. <sup>49</sup> I am going to send you what my Father has promised; but stay in the city until you have been clothed with power from on high” (Lu 24:46-49)

# Conclusion

- In understanding the gospel, we must read the Bible backward
- The Kingdom of God has arrived (Mk 1:5) but we must pray and wait for the fullness of God's kingdom to be revealed (Matt 6:9-13)
- We live in the "already" but "not yet" of God's kingdom
- The kingdom of God will grow slowly like a mustard seed (Mk 4:32)
- Consistent with the OT, Jesus preached about the kingdom of God, but his actions pointed to the cross and his resurrection, which Paul describes as the gospel (1 Cor 15)
- Jesus inaugurated an "inverted" spiritual kingdom of humility, but a glorious kingdom will come one day when he returns to establish his earthly kingdom on earth