

From Being Scattered to Being One

Robin Todd

Lacey, Washington

www.kingdomheart.org

The importance of understanding and believing the gospel message of the coming Kingdom of God cannot be overstated. It is a matter of life and death for every human being who has ever or will ever walk the face of this earth.

And that is why at the beginning of his ministry not only did Jesus announce that the Kingdom of God was at hand, but with five additional words he summarized for us both the cause and the solution to the problems of this present evil age. He said, "Repent and believe the gospel". This has typically been read to mean "1) repent of your sins, and, 2) believe the gospel". This two part explanation is not necessarily inaccurate, but I wonder it has unintentionally diminished the statement's intention as a summary explanation of what is at the root of our problems in this age, and the way out of those problems. I suggest to you that the more singular purpose of the statement, "repent and believe the gospel", is better understood as "repent of not believing the gospel". In other words, our collective and individual descent into lawlessness began by disbelieving the gospel of the Kingdom; our current captivity to sin is sustained by disbelieving the gospel of the Kingdom; and the way out of the problems of this evil age will be by embracing the gospel of the Kingdom.

Why does the gospel of the coming Kingdom of God have within it such power? Why do the words of this particular and only true biblical gospel message have such a dynamic impact on the human mind that intelligently receives and believes them? The answer is as simple as understanding why man was created. We find in the biblical account of our beginnings that it is man's God-appointed destiny to inherit His Kingdom. We were created with a built-in response mechanism to words and ideas about our glory and destiny in the Kingdom of God. It is therefore no surprise that the holy spirit operates fully in this mental/spiritual environment.

As children of the Creator Father, and from within a trusting Parent/child relationship, human men and women were created with the desire and ability to successfully administer the affairs of God's creation. We recall the words of Jesus who said we should "inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world" (Matt. 25:34). Indeed, at the foundation of this world God had simply and confidently exhorted His children to go "be fruitful and multiply, and fill the earth, and subdue it; and rule over the fish of the sea and over the birds of the sky and over every living thing that moves on the earth" (Gen. 1:28). Is it not plain to see that as far as our Father was concerned you and I have everything it takes as human beings to successfully inherit and administer His Kingdom on this beautiful earth? What could turn us from reaching this potential and glory? I suggest that quite simply it was by believing a message contrary to God's, a message that conveyed to human beings that we are NOT good enough to accomplish this without being something more than human. This message from the enemy, that we would need to first be like God before setting out on this endeavor, has brought doubt about the trustworthiness of our Father's heart for us and a sense of shame regarding our own human condition (Genesis 3). We have been mistrusting God and doubting ourselves and our relationship with Him ever since. It has caused us to seek other methods of self-justification of our worth and lovability in ways that are destructive to both ourselves and others. The gospel message that God has been proclaiming through the fathers, the prophets, His Son Jesus, and the apostles, is meant to restore our confidence in Him and His program for us to become everything we were designed to be and live life the way it was meant to be lived. But we must first intelligently receive this gospel of the coming kingdom and then

believe in it in order for the power of God to move in us as His human children to put on back on the road toward His intended glory for us!

The ultimate message to us from our Father is that we human beings, as far as He is concerned, do have what it takes and are good enough to inherit and administer His Kingdom on earth. To underscore this and as part and parcel of the gospel message, He raised up Jesus the Messiah (i.e. put him on the human scene, Acts 13:33) as a legitimate human being in every sense of the word (Heb. 2:9-17). Through this Jesus, we are filled with trust and confidence in God our Father, His plan for us, acceptance of us, and yes His belief in us as we walk as one with Him and Jesus who now sits at His right hand. The erroneous teaching that Jesus is a God-man and part of a Trinitarian "God essence" ultimately has the effect of undermining our Father's message to His human children. It is intended by the Enemy as a counter move to nullify our healing and restoration. Satan knows what we can be and fears that. That is why as long as we are physical carbon-based creatures he will pull out all stops to destroy us. His future depends on our failure to achieve our potential as children of God. So I say again as I said at the beginning of this, the importance of the gospel message of the coming Kingdom of God cannot be overstated...it is a matter of life and death, both now and for some in the age to come (Matt. 13:19; Luke 8:12; Rev. 29:7-8).

Over the course of the past 5 years, Marisa and I have been on a quest to find fellow believers in this biblical gospel. Our motivation has been simply one of a desire for more fellowship, born out of a geographical isolation from the rest of our brethren in Christ.

(Share the Worldwide Scattered Brethren Network)

But as our work proceeds I am now starting to be driven by a desire to not just locate and connect other believers, but to become one with them in God the Father and Jesus Christ. This I find however, is not the desire of all those we have encountered through our efforts to establish the network. The same positive, stubborn individuality which fostered a relentless search for truth in the midst of religious confusion and persecution, unfortunately lingers on in a more negative reluctance to get "too close" to others especially in organizational terms. I know there are many reasons for this, and it is not my purpose to talk about those reasons today or to judge the motivations of others. Today I simply want to take note that in perhaps the most intimate communication with His Father while on earth, Jesus prayed that we all would be one just as he and his Father are (John 17:21-22). I sense but cannot prove, an urgency in God's timeline for believers of this generation to stand up now and identify whether they are in or out in terms of being one with Jesus and the Father. Individual knowing and believing is one thing, and commendable, but it seems that there is an additional "requirement" in the life of a growing Christian. This being one with God and Jesus is linked somehow to becoming one with each other! I don't want any of us to miss this opportunity now that we have come so far with God's help. Yet I do believe that this is a step we are being asked, or even commanded to take if we want to continue on toward perfection. So the question now is; how can we become one with each other?

The answer to this may require us to look a bit more deeply into what it means for Jesus to be one with the Father. In that quest, John 17:1 cuts quickly into the heart of the matter.

"Jesus spoke these things; and lifting up his eyes to heaven, he said, 'Father, the hour has come; glorify Your Son, that the Son may glorify You...'" Brethren, I wonder if we can truly appreciate the desire of Jesus expressed here? In modern vernacular perhaps, do we "feel" him? To read these words draws us into the very

heart of Jesus, which is key to understanding his success as the most amazing, successful, and unique human being ever to live.

Notice in this sentence that everything Jesus desires for himself flows out of a desire to glorify his Father. He is so proud of his Father that he wants more than anything else in the world to raise Him up in the eyes of the whole world. This is far, far more than an “obedient” son in terms of subordination. This is a son who has the highest regard and appreciation for his Father’s heart, mind, and activity. This is a son who knows the Father in such an all-encompassing way, that this knowing is life itself for him. The Father is everything the son wants to be...it is the essence of life to him. And he wants to share that knowledge and that life with everyone who will listen. It is not enough for him to simply hunker down with this knowledge, satisfied in his own belief. The son will not achieve a satisfactory level of joy for even himself until and unless he is able to “brag” about his Father and ours. “This is eternal life, that they may know You, the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom you have sent” (John 17:3).

But, how did Jesus come to know the Father in this very intimate way? How did he come to appreciate and value so highly his Father’s way of thinking? Was there a mechanism whereby he arrived at such a place? The answer is yes, and it is one which you and I can access as well in this process of becoming one with Jesus and his Father, and with each other at the same time.

Before reviewing this mechanism scripturally, allow me to share something of my own life experience which has helped me so much to grasp what is involved in this process of becoming one with another human being, and how much more with God and Jesus.

Many of you have heard me talk about my dad before, but allow me this yet again by way of illustrating my point today. I promise not to carry on, but will get right to it. In my early twenties I started a career in the retail hardware industry, working for the same corporation my father had been with for two decades. By this time he had been a successful store manager for several years with the second most profitable store in the chain and with the only non-union staff. As I intended to work my way up the ladder of success with this company, I spent many hours in conversation with my dad, late into the night. We even saw the sun come up on a few occasions. Through the years as we shared his stories and mine about our common work, I became increasingly impressed with my dad’s wisdom and his somewhat unorthodox way of thinking. It became my unconscious and conscious intention to make his way my own in the business world. But much more than that, this desire to replicate him in the business community, grew into something much bigger and pervasive. I found myself with his world view, his sense of humor, his sense of right and wrong, and even some of his idiosyncrasies. In short, he and I became one. Since his death 20 years ago, I have hung onto these things and they are my strength. I am proud to glorify my father through myself to you. I believe that someday after you have gotten to know him, you will consider yourself blessed enormously by the relationship.

So here’s the point I’m trying to make with this personal example. My father’s work was important to him, and he was very good at it. I got to know him and what he was all about, by sharing in that work. The process of achieving common goals and objectives while sharing a common mindset, was for me the most efficient mechanism by which to achieve a oneness of heart, mind, and purpose. Yes, there are certainly other ways to get to know someone. My dad and I for example did spend time in more recreational settings such as camping and family gatherings. But no casual conversation could have had the effect on me that engaging with him in the same work did. It was there that our minds met, became entangled, and formed the good foundation for whatever was to come in our relationship.

In doing this, was I not inadvertently just doing what Jesus did on a more spiritual level? Listen to some of the things he said regarding his relationship with his Father:

John 5:17—“My Father is working until now, and I myself am working.”

John 5:19—“...the Son can do nothing of himself, unless it is something he sees the Father doing; for whatever the Father does, these things the Son also does in like manner.”

John 5:30—“I can do nothing on my own initiative.”

Luke 4:43—“I must preach the kingdom of God to the other cities also, for I was sent for this purpose.”

John 12:49—“...the Father who sent me has given me a commandment as to what to say and what to speak.”

John 10:30—“I and the Father are one.”

Jesus saw his Father preaching and teaching the gospel of the Kingdom through the fathers and the prophets, and he did the same to his disciples and anyone within earshot. In John 17:4 it records him saying, “I glorified You on earth, having accomplished the work which You have given me to do.”

Speaking of his disciples in John 17:13-14, Jesus then says this about his work, the work of the disciples, and oneness; “But now I come to You; and these things I speak in the world so that they may have my joy made full in themselves. I have given them Your word; and the world has hated them, because they are not of the world, even as I am not of the world.” He goes on in vs. 17, “Sanctify them in the truth; Your word is truth. As You sent me into the world, I also have sent them into the world. For their sakes I sanctify myself, that they themselves also may be sanctified in truth. I do not ask on behalf of these alone, but for those also who believe in me through their word; that they may all be one; even as You, Father, are in me and I in You, that they also may be in us, so that the world may believe that You sent me. The glory which You have given me I have given to them, that they may be one, just as we are one.”

Friends and brethren, if we are truly going to be one with each other, as Jesus prayed that we would be, then we need to know Jesus and the Father in a way that motivates us to glorify them in ourselves. And to know them in that way, if we follow the example of Jesus, we need to throw ourselves into their common work. It appears that those who throw themselves into the work of announcing the kingdom message, in whatever way they are gifted or talented, will be those who acquire the oneness Jesus prayed about. This now goes beyond our desire to be right about biblical truth and hunkering down with a self-righteous defensive posture toward the world outside. And it certainly goes beyond keeping the truth to ourselves and watering down what we share with others about what we know. This is about desiring to be one, which is as inextricably entangled with common work as it is with common belief.

Through work with the Worldwide Scattered Brethren Network project, I have met all kinds of people with all kinds of ideas and attitudes. We agree on some basics and I am hoping in time we can work on the rest. We will probably all never be in full agreement this side of the Kingdom. But this I now believe. We should desire to be one on as many levels as possible. Desire is the leading edge of achievement every time, no matter what the endeavor. Without the desire to be one, we won't be one. And that desire just simply will not be there in ample quantity unless it is accompanied by humility. In the end, truth seeking is not enough...it is only a start. To be truly one the way Jesus and the Father are, and the way they want us to be with them and each other, we must engage with them and each other in our common work. We can't know Jesus, glorify Jesus, or be one with Jesus, unless and until we do. That's our challenge today, and that is now the reason Marisa and I reach out to our brethren in scattered places around the world.