

A Twisted Paul and Rejected Jesus

by Anthony Buzzard

My thesis today is that we are surrounded by a dangerous tendency to believe in and promote **a twisted Paul and rejected Jesus**.

My appeal is that unitarian believers take time to verify that they have not drifted away from their own heritage. This can easily happen when powerful new movements, even unitarian ones, arise and exercise their persuasive power. I believe that the unitarian people in the 1850's put their fingers on a fundamental flaw in popular versions of Christianity. The passage of time can almost inevitably lessen the clarity of that original Abrahamic discovery. We are all easily prone not to think critically, but just to go along with the status quo. To summarize: we are faced with a potential rejection of Jesus and a twisting of Paul.

Let me show you this by quoting a famous Dispensationalist and then citing a number of oddly neglected verses which if preached and emphasized could eliminate the Dispensationalist error and restore the truth. It is only by having a passion for TRUTH that we can hope to be saved (2 Thess. 2:10).

First we need to reestablish clarity on this point about **covenant**: The all-important covenant made with Abraham is **different from** the later covenant made with Moses. The covenant with Moses is not the same as the covenant made with Abraham and certainly not the covenant made by Jesus.

To show this, I remind you of **Deuteronomy 5:2-3**: This verse established clearly that the Mosaic "covenant made at Sinai/Horeb was **not** made with our fathers." Our faith must therefore have as its foundation the promises **made to father Abraham**, not the covenant made with Moses. True Christianity means having "the faith of Abraham" (Rom. 4:16) which is also "the faith of Jesus,"¹ not just "faith in Jesus" which is too vague a definition.

The biggest lies have the best chance of being believed. The biggest lies too can be what you don't say, what you leave out of your Gospel story. A number of fundamentally important verses are just not reaching the public ear. The Apostles and Jesus, with amazing foresight, warned us against being deceived. These Apostles were inspired to see what was coming, and warned precisely and deliberately, as in **1 Timothy 6:3** and **2 John 7-9**. The major issue is failure to believe and obey **the teachings of Jesus**. These verses are not getting enough attention. They sound the alarm against any loss of the teaching of Jesus. I want to do my best to correct that threatening situation.

My point is a simple one. The Gospel, preached by Jesus, has been "gutted" of its major component, and has been replaced by a half-Gospel. The **first** element in the Gospel, the Kingdom, has been put out of sight. The Gospel as Jesus and Paul preached it does not just

¹ Faith of Jesus: Rom. 3:22, 26; Gal. 2:16, 20; 3:22; Eph. 1:15; 3:12; Phil. 3:9; Col. 1:4; 2:5; James 2:1; Philem. 5; Rev. 2:13; 14:12; 19:10.

offer us forgiveness of sin, huge as that is, but forgiveness so that we may then go on to regain the status lost in Adam and find our true Destiny.

We are saved, not just to be **forgiven**, but in view of the great, overarching Bible purpose as described in **Jeremiah 27:5**. This is one of the grandest accounts of the Gospel. God wants to **give us the** whole world as our inheritance: “As I have made the earth by My great power and by My outstretched arm, I can give it to whomever I see fit.”

Jesus echoed this with his: “Fear not, little flock; it is your Father’s good pleasure and desire to **give you** the Kingdom” (Luke 12:32). This is exactly repeated in **Romans 4:13**, which reads, “The promise to **Abraham and to his seed [is] that he would have the world as his inheritance.**” Christians are defined by Paul as the “seed of Abraham” (Gal. 3:29).

I remind you of these words from an Archbishop of Canterbury about the astonishing absence of the Gospel of the Kingdom during all of church history. Absence of the Gospel means absence of Jesus and thus absence of Christianity! The Archbishop wrote, and please allow for his tendency to British understatement!

“Every generation finds something in the Gospel which is of special importance to itself and seems to have been overlooked in the previous age or (sometimes) in all previous ages of the Church. The great discovery of the age in which we live is the immense prominence given in the Gospel to the Kingdom of God. To us it is quite extraordinary that it figures so little in the theology and religious writings of almost the entire period of Christian history. Certainly in the Synoptic Gospels [Matthew, Mark and Luke] it has a prominence that could hardly be increased.”

In this our 30th year of presenting reflections on the current state of affairs among the Kingdom unitarian people, my sense is that a serious division has arisen among us affecting the very heart of the teaching of Jesus himself. I start by pointing out that you are living in a Bible atmosphere in America, which does not take the Gospel of Jesus (the Gospel as preached by Jesus) anything like as seriously or precisely as our Bible documents.

All of you listening are probably quite convinced that the Gospel of the Kingdom was the heart of Jesus’ business. To test yourself on that point: is anyone in our audience doubtful about **Luke 4:43**? That’s the verse which supplies and provides Jesus’ own mission statement. You would think that this ought to be basic for all believers, a grand John 3:16. But it is not. Tracts and books on salvation simply omit Luke 4:43! Rick Warren’s *Purpose Driven Church* does not even mention it!

Likewise, if you happen to have been touched by the theology of so-called Dispensationalism, you will have been taught that the Gospel of the Kingdom is *not* the Gospel for you today. I quote as one example the 21st chapter of Clarence Larkin’s book, his *Commentary on Daniel*.

He rightly states that the Gospel of the Kingdom was preached by Jesus and the Apostles, but this, Larkin maintains, was only to Jews, and when the Jews generally refused it, **that Gospel of the Kingdom ceased**, and it was replaced by what Larkin calls “the Gospel of the grace of God”! This is an astonishing systematic error, calculated I think to

invite the chilling words of Jesus, when he said that only those who hear and do what he says can hope to qualify for the Kingdom and salvation (Luke 6:46). Here are the complete words of Larkin on the Gospel:

“The word Gospel means Good News. The Gospel of the Kingdom is the Good News that God is going to set up a Kingdom of the earth over which David’s son Jesus shall reign (Luke 1:32, 33). This Gospel was proclaimed by John the Baptist and Jesus and his disciples in the words, ‘Repent for the Kingdom of Heaven is at hand.’ The call to repent was not to individuals but to the nation. The nation refused and rejected the King and crucified him. But before the King’s death ‘the Gospel of the Kingdom’ which up to that time had been preached only in Palestine, and not in all the world, **was withdrawn**. It is to be preached again after the Church has been ‘caught out,’ and then not only in Palestine but in the whole world. And it is a call to Israel as a nation to repent, and that Christ is coming to set up the ‘stone’ (Dan. 2:34-35, 44-45) or millennial kingdom.

“Dispensationalism, which is widespread in evangelicalism, teaches then that between the two preachings of the Gospel of the Kingdom, we have the preaching of a different gospel of the grace of God. It is the proclamation of salvation through faith in the Atoning Sacrifice of Christ on the cross” (Rev. Clarence Larkin, author of the “Great Book” on “dispensational truth.” 1929, p. 261).

I remind you of Jesus’ words: “Multitudes will say to me on that future day, ‘Lord, lord, look what we did by way of preaching for you and even doing miracles for you.’” Jesus’ response is simply that they had not laid the foundation of sound teaching by making his Kingdom gospel the heart and center of everything preached. Jesus was warning about Christian failure, in the context of his call that we are to “beware of false prophets” (Matt. 7:15, 21).

In Favor of Beautiful Truth

I was thrilled recently to find the *Cambridge Bible for Schools and Colleges* stating on Hebrews 2 that “**Jesus was the first preacher of his own Gospel (Mark 1:14).**”

That is superbly true. But the Billy Graham system insists that “Jesus came to do three days’ work: To die, to be buried and to rise from death.” That definition eliminates a major neglected text which I argue can bring us all back on track. That is **Mark 1:1**, which brilliantly states that the subject of Mark’s writing is “The beginning of the gospel of Jesus Christ.” Not the middle, not the end, not one part of it — but the **beginning** of the Gospel as Jesus preached it.

The definition of the Gospel is then provided in **Mark 1:14-15**. The Gospel is called “God’s Gospel,” uniting it to eight other occurrences across the NT of that same phrase,²

² God’s Gospel: Mark 1:14; Rom. 1:1; 15:16; 2 Cor. 11:7; 1 Thess. 2:2, 8, 9; 1 Tim. 1:11; 1 Pet. 4:17.

“God’s Gospel” (the Gospel of God) providing the most essential indispensable foundation for Christianity. It is God’s Gospel **about the Kingdom**.

When we speak of the Gospel to our friends there is no better place to begin than Mark 1:1. But you will not find this passage in any tract offering salvation. Nor astonishingly will you find **Acts 20:24 and the following verse 25**, which provides a marvelous definition of what Paul preached as the Gospel. I remind you that in Acts 20:24 Paul summarized his whole Christian preaching career by saying that he had “preached the gospel of the grace of God.” Ask your friends politely what the next verse says. I don’t think they will know. Verse 25, which is carefully avoided in evangelical literature, defines what is meant by that Gospel of grace. Paul defines that Gospel of grace as his own preaching of the Gospel of the Kingdom. Paul sounds just like Jesus! And sanity is restored to the whole NT Gospel — it is about the Kingdom!

Jesus and Paul have to be reconnected! I suggest that there is a concerted effort in much of evangelicalism to keep that simple fatal detachment of Jesus and Paul out of sight.

So then there are different ways of avoiding the truth about the Gospel. Dispensationalism of the Larkin type simply announces that the Gospel of the Kingdom ceased, when the Jews rejected it, but that it will be resumed only after the imaginary pre-tribulation rapture. That Dispensationalism forbids you effectively to obey the opening command of Jesus in Mark 1:14-15: “Repent and believe the Gospel of the Kingdom.” Salvation is by obedience to Jesus (Heb. 5:9), and here is his first command.

I think it is time for us to remind ourselves that the Jesus story is the story of the whole Bible and it is a Jewish story. The very first thing said about Jesus is that “the Lord will give him the throne of his father David, and he will reign over the house of Israel, and his Kingdom will be endless” (Luke 1:32-33). Jesus will inherit “the sure mercies of David” (Isa. 55:3: “covenantal promises,” NET). And this is the New Covenant.

I certainly could not have known any of this in the first 20 years of my Church of England experience. (I am not lying: I was there.) The Kingdom of God is the heart and center of the New, not the Old Mosaic Covenant. In **Jeremiah 33:20-21**, God made His point with ultimate emphasis. “If you can alter My covenant with day and night you can alter My covenant with David, so that he will never cease to have a king ruling on his throne.” That is the Gospel, too. If you lose that you lose the Gospel and Christianity.

If we are not teaching with complete clarity the fact that the New Covenant is the covenant about the Kingdom of God, we are missing out on very much. Thus in **Luke 22:29** Jesus stated that he was **covenanting**, not just giving, his disciples a Kingdom just as God had “**covenanted** a kingdom” to him as Messiah. To say then that this Kingdom covenant belongs in the **Old Testament** is a way of cancelling Jesus, something we must never risk doing.

Here is what has happened: Evangelicalism has rightly stressed that the death of Jesus results in our being forgiven for our sins. But the Gospel did **not begin** with that fact. The great fact which is so desperately missing from popular preaching is that Jesus’ and God’s

intention is **to give** us the kingdom. “Fear not, little flock, your Father is delighted to give you the kingdom,” and that Kingdom was defined with clarity to Abraham: “The promise was to Abraham and his descendants [who are us!] that he would be heir of the entire world” — not the universe, but the world as created for man. It was precisely this which we remember Adam lost, and it is precisely this which Jesus, as the second Adam, made it his business to restore.

Now please note that there is an extant unitarian translation of the Bible which 1) states that the four Gospels really belong in the Old Testament and 2) “There is no reason to baptize in water today.”

In those early teenage years of Jesus as he searched the Scriptures daily he found his own career in them, the career of the one designated by God to restore law and order, peace and security, and the abolition of all hostility between nations. Jesus had read — and he comes to us as a kind of Mozart of biblical exposition — that God was going to **plant or sow** a new people. “I will plant My people in the land” (Hosea 2:23).

Yes, God was going to **sow** them. It follows of course that Jesus spoke primarily and always of the parable of the **sower**, where the saving Gospel message itself is defined as the Gospel **message about the Kingdom** (Matt. 13:19). If one loses track of that basic fact, then one has lost the foundation of the Christian faith, and one risks building on sand. Evangelical tracts offering “salvation” have not a word to say about the parable of the sower!

Why is it that everyone knows “you must be born again” to be saved (John 3), but almost no one tells you that being born again can only happen when you are exposed to the seed Gospel which was preached to you, the seed of immortality which was preached to you as Gospel! (1 Pet. 22:23-25).

What has happened is that the Christian future, i.e. **hope**, on which faith and love depend (Col. 1:4-5), has been reduced and canceled and replaced by “going to heaven” when you die, to do who knows what! Jesus was of the opposite opinion: “How blessed are the meek; they are going to have the earth/land as their inheritance” (Matt. 5:5 quoting from five verses in Ps. 37). And in Romans 8:32, “How much more will God give to us and to Jesus everything?” Did you grasp that God wants to give you the world as your inheritance?

The *International Critical Commentary* has this excellent statement:

“Jews as vassals of a legal system do not qualify as true believers. As one of the descendants of Abraham, Abraham’s seed was to **enjoy worldwide dominion**. This faith-righteousness which Paul described as characteristic of the Christian, and before him of Abraham is the right to universal dominion which will belong to the Messiah and his people. If the right to universal dominion which will belong to the Messiah and his people is confined to those who are subject to the Law of Moses, what can it have to do either with the promise originally given to Abraham or the faith to which that promise was annexed? If these promises belonged to the Law of

Moses then they would be pushed aside and cancelled altogether” (Sanday and Headlam, *ICC*, p. 111)

That would be ultimate Christian failure! Please make sure you know that Jesus was the first preacher of his own Gospel — that Jesus is not a warmed over copy of Moses! On no account be guilty of cancelling Jesus in the name of a twisted Paul! By no means should you say that Jesus is a model of the Old Covenant! That would be the worst form of being out of date! The Torah of Messiah is not the Torah of Moses.

Paul is willing in **1 Corinthians 9:20-21** to do “Moses things” when in the company of Jews who are “under the Law, in order to win them.” Paul, speaking for Jesus, is himself “NOT under that Mosaic Law, but rather within the Torah of Messiah” — a huge difference.

To preserve the Abrahamic faith, “the faith of Abraham” (Rom. 4:16) intact, these truths must be struggled for!

“The Apostle’s first application of this principle is to the religio-national distinctions related to being Jews or Gentiles, being circumcised or uncircumcised. In a Gentile situation like that in Corinth, some Jews may have tried to obliterate the covenant mark of circumcision. Compare with I Macc. 1:15. On the other hand Judaizers tried to force circumcision on the Gentile Christians” (Acts 15:1-5; Gal 3:1-3; 5:1).

“Paul argues that this outward sign of circumcision with its stress on the Jew versus the non-Jew now has no significance. If a person was a circumcised Jew when he was saved he should not become uncircumcised. **If he was an uncircumcised Gentile he should not be circumcised in order to become Jewish.** Circumcision and circumcision now make no difference (Rom 2:25, 29; Gal. 5:6), but keeping God’s command is essential (v. 19; John 14:15)” (*Expositor’s Bible Commentary*, 2. 233).

“I have a great new idea for making hot coffee: put it in the freezer.” (Newt Gingrich)