The Kingdom of God and Eternal Life (#2)
The Gospel of The Kingdom of God
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Ricapitulation

Last time we studied the proclamation of the Lord Jesus, "Repent, for the kingdom of God has come near," today we continue our study of the kingdom of God and eternal life in the Bible.

The gospel of the Kingdom of God

Many people think that the gospel is simply believing in Jesus to have eternal life, if you believe in Jesus, you will have eternal life; People think that it is what gospel is all about.

But what does the Bible say? How does the Bible define the gospel? The Bible says the gospel is about the kingdom of God, the gospel is not simply believing in Jesus to have eternal life! Let's look at 3 passages in the Bible:

> NAU **Matthew 4:23** Jesus was going throughout all Galilee, teaching in their synagogues and proclaiming the gospel of the kingdom, and healing every kind of disease and every kind of sickness among the people. (Mat 4:23 NAU)

> NAU **Matthew 9:35** Jesus was going through all the cities and villages, teaching in their synagogues and proclaiming the gospel of the kingdom, and healing every kind of disease and every kind of sickness. (Mat 9:35 NAU)

> NAU **Matthew 24:14** "This gospel of the kingdom shall be preached in the whole world as a testimony to all the nations, and then the end will come. (Mat 24:14 NAU)

These 3 passages clearly proclaim "gospel of the kingdom", gospel is about the kingdom of God, gospel is not simply believing in Jesus to have eternal life.

What exactly is the gospel of the kingdom of God?

Gospel means good news; What exactly is the gospel of the kingdom of God?

> NAU **Luke 4:18-19** "THE SPIRIT OF THE LORD IS UPON ME, BECAUSE HE ANOINTED ME TO PREACH THE GOSPEL TO THE POOR. HE HAS SENT ME TO PROCLAIM RELEASE TO THE CAPTIVES, AND RECOVERY OF SIGHT TO THE BLIND, TO SET

FREE THOSE WHO ARE OPPRESSED, [19] TO PROCLAIM THE FAVORABLE YEAR OF THE LORD." (Luk 4:18-19 NAU)

Here the Lord Jesus says he would proclaim good news to the poor; but as we look at the accounts in the four gospels: Matthew, Mark, Luke and John, we see that quite often the Lord preached to a big crowd of people, in a big crowd there would be some poor people as well as some rich people, it wouldn't be all poor people. And one of the twelve apostles Matthew, he was a tax collector, usually tax collectors were rich, Matthew was not poor; Even though it is true that Matthew gave up everything to follow the Lord, and he became poor, but when the Lord called him, at that time he was a rich tax collector.

The Lord Jesus also says he would proclaim freedom for the prisoners, does it mean that when the prisoners hear the gospel, they would be released from the jail? No, it didn't. Today there are many Christian preachers going into prisons to preach the gospel, even if the prisoners believe in the gospel, they are still in the prison! When Pastor Bentley and I preached the gospel in Philippines, Pastor Bentley and another co-worker went to the prison to preach the gospel, even though the prisoners listened to the gospel every week, but they were not released!

Not only that, many people may even say that I am not poor, I am not a prisoner, I am certainly not blind, I may feel oppressed sometimes, but not all the time. The Lord Jesus proclaimed good news to the poor, the blind, the oppressed, but I am not one of this type of people; in other words, this good news is not for me!

Brothers, sisters and friends, here the Lord Jesus is talking about spiritually poor, spiritual prisoner, spiritually blind, spiritually oppressed; the Lord is preaching to this type of people, and he would proclaim to them the spiritual favorable year of God.

What is spiritually poor?

Now let's study this proclamation of the Lord Jesus step by step. First, what is spiritually poor?

We all understand what is financially poor. Even if you are not financially poor, but you certainly understand the meaning of financially poor. Now I draw a parallel between financially poor and spiritually poor to help you to understand the meaning of spiritually poor.

- The financially poor lack money, and the spiritually poor lack spiritual riches;
- The financially poor certainly know they are poor financially, and the spiritually poor know they lack spiritual riches, they know they are poor spiritually;

- The financially poor would pursue money, and the spiritually poor would pursue spiritual riches.

NAU **Proverbs 22:4** The reward of humility *and* the fear of the LORD Are riches, honor and life. (Pro 22:4 NAU)

Please pay attention to this word "LORD", L, O, R, D all capital letters; the Hebrew Bible was written in Hebrew, the original Hebrew word for "LORD" is "יהוה" (Yahweh), that is the name of God. Whenever you see in the English Bible the word "LORD", all capital letters, that stands for Yahweh, the name of God.

Here it says the reward for humility and fear of Yahweh is riches and honor and life, that means people who are humble and fear Yahweh would be rewarded with riches and honor and life, Yahweh God would reward these people who are humble and fear Him with riches and honor and life.

Does the word "riches" here mean material riches or spiritual riches? Which one does it refer to? If these people are financially poor and hungry, they woul prefer food and material riches, they may not like honor and life; usually only after their basic need is met, then people would think of honor and life; of course there are exceptional cases, some people even in their extreme poverty, they still seek honor and life; and true Christians are supposed to seek honor and life even in poverty; but here we are talking about ordinary people in general cases, when they are in financial poverty and they are hungry, they would seek food and material riches. This verse says Yahweh would reward these people with riches and honor and life, so it shows that they are not financially poor, they are spiritually poor, and they are humble and fear Yahweh God. In the future if the Lord is willing, we will study more about spiritually poor.

From this verse we see that the spiritually poor are those who realize they lack spirital riches, honor and life, so they would seek spiritual riches, honor and life, and they are humble and fear God. That's why the Lord Jesus said that he would preach the gospel to the spiritually poor, because they realize they lack spiritual riches, they are humble and fear God.

The spiritual captives are released

The Lord Jesus would also proclaimed freedom for the prisoners; these are spiritual prisoners, that means prisoners of sin, they are controlled by sin.

Let me tell you a true story to illustrate to you the meaning of prisoner of sin. There was a woman, she and her husband both were professionals, they both earned high salaries; they had two very intelligent boys. Such a family should be very happy, right? No, they were not happy at all, actually their lives were miserable. Why? Because this woman and her husband got into big fight very often. Every summer they would go for a long vacation, because they had a lot of money. In one summer before they went for the long vacation, this woman told me that she was very worried, I asked her why, she said in every vacation she and her husband would get into a big argument, when they came back home, they would feel very depressed and more tired than before the vacation. I asked her why they got into a big argument evey time, and usually who was the one who caused the argument? She said that she was the one who caused the argument, she would deliberately said somehing very hurtful to hurt her husband, then he couldn't take it and shouted back at her, and the argument started. I asked her, "Is it like that every time?" She said, "Yes!" I was very surprised, I said to her, "It was always you who caused the argument, can you just be more careful with your tongue, not to deliberately say things to hurt him?" She said, "No, I couldn't help it! I didn't want to say those hurtful things either, but I couldn't control my tongue, the words just came out of my mouth!"

Please notice what she said, "…I didn't want to say those hurtful things either, but I couldn't control my tongue, the words just came out of my mouth!" She didn't want to say it, but sin forced her to say it! This is the typical example of a spiritual prisoner controlled by sin!

> NAU **Romans 7:18-20** For I know that nothing good dwells in me, that is, in my flesh; for the willing is present in me, but the doing of the good *is* not. 19 For the good that I want, I do not do, but I practice the very evil that I do not want. 20 But if I am doing the very thing I do not want, I am no longer the one doing it, but sin which dwells in me. (Rom 7:18-20 NAU)

In this passage Paul was decribing his own miserable state before he came to know the Lord Jesus Christ, he said that he had the desire to do the right thing, but he couldn't carry it out: he did not do the good he wanted to do, but he kept on doing the evil he did not want. That woman's situation was exactly like that.

> NAU **Romans 7:24-25** Wretched man that I am! Who will set me free from the body of this death? 25 Thanks be to God through Jesus Christ our Lord! (Rom 7:24-25 NAU)

Here Paul says the Lord Jesus Christ has set him free from the body of death. The Lord has set apostle Paul free, and he will also set the other spiritual prisoners free from the control of sin, if they believe in him and obey him.

The sight of the spiritually blind is recovered

The Lord Jesus also said that the sight of the spiritually blind is recovered. What does it mean to be spiritually blind? What does the spiritually blind cannot see? The spiritually blind cannot see the spiritual things, they only see the physical things, they only see the riches of this world, they only see the power of money; they cannot see the kingship of God is actually governing the whole universe

> NAU **Matthew 23:16-19** "Woe to you, blind guides, who say, 'Whoever swears by the temple, *that* is nothing; but whoever swears by the gold of the temple is obligated.' 17 "You fools and blind men! Which is more important, the gold or the temple that sanctified the gold? 18 "And, 'Whoever swears by the altar, *that* is nothing, but whoever swears by the offering on it, he is obligated.' 19 "You blind men, which is more important, the offering, or the altar that sanctifies the offering?" (Mat 23:16-19 NAU)

The Lord Jesus said that the spiritually blind see the physical things are more valuable than the spiritual things, that's why to them the gold in the temple is more valuable than the temple, and the offering on the altar is more important than the altar.

> NAU **Matthew 23:24-26** "You blind guides, who strain out a gnat and swallow a camel! 25 "Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! For you clean the outside of the cup and of the dish, but inside they are full of robbery and self-indulgence. 26 "You blind Pharisee, first clean the inside of the cup and of the dish, so that the outside of it may become clean also.
> (Mat 23:24-26 NAU)

Here the Lord Jesus says the scribes and Pharisees are blind guides, they are spiritually blind; they only clean the outside of the cup and of the dish, but inside they are full of robbery and self-indulgence. The Lord says this kind of behavior is "strain out a gnat and swallow a camel". A camel is an gigantic animal, but a gnat is very small; The Lord compares the outside things to a gnat, and inside things to a camel; the outside things are insignificant compared to the inside things; but the spiritually blind pays attention to the very minor things and ignore the more serious things.

The Lord says they are full of robbery and self-indulgence in their hearts, but they don't pay attention to it, instead they only care about the external things. Why? Because they want to show off the external things to the world, they want the praise of men.

This passage show that the spiritually blind see the external things are more important than the internal things, because they want the praise of people.

> NAU **Luke 6:41-42** 41 "Why do you look at the speck that is in your brother's eye, but do not notice the log that is in your own eye? 42 "Or how can you say to your brother, 'Brother, let me take out the speck that is in your eye,' when you yourself do not see the log that is in your own eye? You hypocrite, first take the log out of your own eye, and then you will see clearly to take out the speck that is in your brother's eye. (Luk 6:41-42 NAU)

Here the Lord said the hypocrite only see the speck in other people's eyes but they don't see the log in his own eyes, that means he only sees other people's problems, but he doesn't see his own sins.

When the Lord Jesus opens the sight of the spiritually blind, they will see the spiritual things, they see the kingship of God is governing the whole universe, they see the spiritual things are more important than the physical things; they pay attention to the things in the heart, not the external things; especially they can see their own sins, instead of only seeing other people's problems.

Illustration: Many years ago I got to know some women who were school teachers. Usually teachers care about the students' behavior, when they see the students don't behave properly, they would point them out and correct them. These women had been school teachers for many years, they had been correcting students for many years, that's why they thought that even if they were not perfect, but they were much better than most people in the world. Until they believed in Yahweh God and the Lord Jesus, and they got baptized, after that suddenly they realized that not only their heart attitude was wrong, and sometimes even they themselves would do the wrong things; all along they had only seen the wrong hehaviors of the students, now they saw that even they themselves also did the wrong things; that's a big shock to them. The Lord Jesus had opened their spiritual eye sight and they could see their own problems instead of only seeing other people's problems.

Those who are oppressed would be set free

The Lord Jesus also proclaimed that those who are oppressed by sin woul be set free. What does it mean to be oppressed by sin? Let me tell you a true and sad story of two teenaged boys.

When Pastor Bentley and I were preaching gospel in a certain country in Asia, we got to know a mother and two teenaged boys. I still remember the day we met them, the mother kept weeping and weeping, the two boys bowed their heads down in shame, because they both were drug addicts.

The mother said that when she found out the two boys were addicted to drugs, she knew that only the government had the facility to help them, so she brought them to the police immediately. The two boys were sent to the rehab (the rehabilitation center); under the care of the medical doctors and specialists, counsellors, after sometime they were able to kick the drug addiction, so the mother happily received them back home. But soon after that they were taking drug again; then the mother had to report to the police to send them to the rehab again. For a few years the family was repeating this vicious cycle again and again. The mother felt hopeless, she almost gave up all hopes. The two boys knew it was wrong to be addicted to drugs, but the power of drugs was too strong for them, they couldn't fight against it.

After twenty some years I still remember the image of these two addicted teenage boys and a heartbroken mother; all I can do is to pray for them and ask Yahweh God to help them. This is a typical example of people oppressed by sin. The Lord Jesus proclaimed freedom for those who are oppressed by sin; If these two boys were willing to commit their lives totally to Yahweh God, God would free them from the power of drugs.

To proclaim the year of God's favor

Finally The Lord Jesus also proclaimed the year of God's favor. What is the year of God's favor?

According to the Law in Hebrew Bible (Leviticus 25:8-13 NAU) the tenth (10^{th}) day of the seventh (7^{th}) month is the Day of Atonement. Every forty-nine (49) years, on the Day of Attonement the Israelites shall blow the horn of a ram to announce to all people that it is the Day of Atonement of the 49^{th} year; then the following year that is the fiftieth (50^{th}) year is holy to God, it was called a jubilee the favorable year of God. In that favorable year of God the Israelites should proclaim release to all people, all property that were sold would be restored to its original owners, and all Hebrew slaves were to be released to return to their family property, that year (the 50^{th} year) was called a jubilee the favorable year of God.

The Lord Jesus said that he would proclaim the spiritual favorable year. What does spiritual favorable year mean? It means the sins of all sinners would be forgiven, they will be set free from the power of sin.

Conclusion

Today we study the gospel of the kingdom of God. The gospel of the kingdom of God is for the spiritually poor, the spiritual prisoners would be released, the spiritually blind would be able to see, the spiritually oppressed would be set free, and all sinners would be set free from the power of sin.

If you submit to the kingship of God now, you would experience all these things in your life right now, that is truly good news.