

providing a future with hope

Challenger

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FULL GOSPEL God's Kingdom Here and Now

By Jeff Bonzelaar, Executive Director

I asked my staff the other day, "What is the gospel?"

They said things like, "The story of Jesus' death, burial, and resurrection," "Salvation from sin," "The cross of Jesus Christ," "A personal relationship with God."

I told them that while these things are all wonderfully true, that's only a small part of the gospel.

The good news is more than forgiveness of sins. It is more than going to heaven after you die. It is more than personal deliverance from the bondages of sin. If all the gospel does is free us from our vain habits and keep us out of hell, the gospel really isn't good news.

Don't get me wrong, these are precious truths. But the gospel is so much more.

In Mark 1:14-15, Jesus defines the gospel: "After John was put in prison, Jesus went into Galilee, proclaiming the good news of God. 'The time has come,' he said. 'The kingdom of God is near. Repent and believe the good news.'"

The gospel is about God's government—His rule and reign. The gospel is the good news of the kingdom. Jesus came to earth to establish the kingdom of God. He came to make the kingdom accessible to everyone, to show us what it looks like and how it is received.

Even more, the gospel is the good news that God's kingdom is "at hand." His kingdom is here-and-now. The rule of heaven has begun. It has broken in and is present on earth. The whole ministry of Jesus was a fleshing-out of this reality.

Regrettably, it seems that most of the church (and not simply my staff) has failed to see the connection between the gospel and the kingdom—let alone the fact of the kingdom's "here-and-now" reality.

"If all the gospel does is free us from our vain habits and keep us out of hell, the gospel really isn't good news."

British author Steve Chalke writes, "We live with the idea that the gospel's chief aim is to make us fit for heaven, when in reality Jesus' message is focused on making us citizens and recipients of the Kingdom of God *today*" (emphasis mine).

A careful reading of the gospels will show that Jesus' focus wasn't so much on how to get into heaven as much as how to bring heaven here. Jesus labored to create in *this* world a new society marked by righteousness, peace, and joy and called His disciples to follow suit. Pastor Rob Bell observes, "(Jesus) talked very little of the life beyond this one because he understood that the life beyond this one is a continuation of the kinds of choices we make here and now."

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Our misunderstanding of the gospel (which stems from a misunderstanding of Jesus) isn't helped by misreadings of passages such as John 3:16: "For God so loved the world that he gave his only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have everlasting life." We read that Jesus came to give us eternal life and somehow think this means, "heaven after you die." The Greek phrase John uses for "everlasting life" literally means "life of the ages," as opposed to, you might say, "life as people are living it these days." *Everlasting life* might be better translated, then, as "a life which is radically different from what is considered the norm" and NOT, "heaven after I die."

There obviously remains a "not yet" aspect with regard to God's present rule on earth. The fullness of the gospel of the kingdom will not be realized until Christ's Second Coming. Then the kingdom of this world will become the kingdom of our God (Rev. 11:15). But that is not to minimize the truth that God's rule and reign is "at hand"—here-and-now—and that we as kingdom citizens are to reclaim the created order by bringing all aspects of it—personal, social, economic, and political—under the lordship of Christ.

As we eagerly wait for that Day, let us not become escapist. May our theme song not be, "Come Lord Jesus, Get Me Out of Here!" I for one am not hoping for some quick heavenly exit so that I can escape the troubles of this life while the world goes down the toilet. We are to occupy until He comes. We are to go in and take possession of the land. We are called to seek first His kingdom . . . *here and now!*

Let us not become fatalistic either. I appreciate people like Christian sociologist Tony Campolo who takes aim at those who, in their dispensational thinking, contend that the world is a sinking ship and that time and efforts are better spent trying to get people off the ship and saved before it goes under. Such a mentality weakens our resolve to fight against evils such as war and poverty and pollution and illiteracy because, as the argument goes, things are only going to get worse. After all, why waste your efforts?

Friends, human history is going somewhere wonderful. In the words of theologian Dallas Willard, this is a "God-bathed world." He will not abandon it. He is working right now, right here to restore everything and bring all things in heaven *and on earth* together under one head (see Acts 3:21; Eph. 1:10).

This is the full gospel. Repent and believe the good news!

Testimony

Peter Blankenbaker

"I was born in 1977 in Trenton, Michigan. When I was about three years old my parents divorced because of my father's drug and alcohol addiction. Shortly after my mother remarried and life became somewhat normal.

Things took a sudden turn, however, when I was in the fourth grade. A friend of my parents molested me. I didn't tell anyone, but my grades began to drop. I could no longer focus on my schoolwork. My heart began to break. The pain, I would later discover, was more than I could bear.

I compensated through sports. I excelled in baseball, basketball and wrestling. When I was competing I felt like I belonged and people wanted to be around me.

I got involved in the party scene. I was exposed to lots of drugs and drinking. I enjoyed smoking marijuana and drinking alcohol because of how it made me feel. I started experimenting with other drugs as well.

2006 Fiscal Report

The following information dates from January 1, 2006 through December 31, 2006.

Income:

• Individual Offerings	\$ 284,832	37.2%
• Church Offerings	\$ 108,463	14.1%
• Businesses/Organ.	\$ 64,482	8.4%
• Walk-a-thon / Golf	\$ 32,359	4.2%
• Entrance Fees (\$700)	\$ 67,231	8.8%
• Banquets	\$ 17,235	2.2%
• Yard/Tree / Misc. Sales	\$ 107,733	14.1%
• Car Washes	\$ 60,441	7.9%
• Other	<u>\$ 23,479</u>	<u>3.1%</u>
TOTAL	\$ 766,255	100%

Disbursements:

• *Gross Payroll	\$ 451,141	57.7%
• Employee Enrichment	\$ 7,661	1.0%
• Utilities (9 Properties)	\$ 97,146	12.4%
• Property Insurance	\$ 25,386	3.2%
• Property Taxes	\$ 15,221	2.0%
• Repairs/Maintenance/Equip.	\$ 62,615	8.0%
• Vehicle Expense (rep.,gas,ins.)	\$ 36,261	4.6%
• Office Exp/Postage	\$ 8,797	1.1%
• Telephone	\$ 9,681	1.2%
• Food	\$ 17,715	2.3%
• Missions	\$ 8,650	1.1%
• Promotional	\$ 4,842	.6%
• Misc./Contingency	<u>\$ 36,474</u>	<u>4.8%</u>
TOTAL	\$ 781,590	100%

* **Note:** This includes weekly salaries, retirement, housing allowance, health insurance, workers' compensation, disability and FICA for 17 employees.

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Conspiring with the King for the increasing realization of His reign,

Jeff

As drugs became more important in my life, I had less and less interest in school. I eventually dropped out and got a full time job. With a steady income I was able to support my drug habit. I eventually got hooked on cocaine.

I met a woman I wanted to marry, but knew I had to change. I was able to give up drugs for a while, and got married. Everything was fine for awhile. I kept thinking about ways, however, to sneak out and get high. I was soon back to my old ways. I was bound and did not know how to break free.

I tried different treatment centers but would come out the same way. My wife gave up hope of me ever changing and left. I fell into despair and did not care about life anymore. I was ashamed of myself and what I had become.

I cried out to God and asked Him to rescue me. The next day a man I knew connected me with Life Challenge. After an interview I entered the program on December 1, 2005.

I learned that the drugs and alcohol were part of a much larger problem. Sin was separating me from God. I needed God's forgiveness and His enabling power to do what was right.

I also needed to learn to accept responsibility. All my life I had blamed everyone and everything for my problems. I had to humble myself and take ownership for the decisions I had made which had ruined my life and hurt many others.

I gave myself to Jesus Christ, and He came into my life. I am now a follower of Jesus. He has given me His strength to turn away from the sins that once ruled my life. He has placed a desire in my heart to draw near to Him. I finally know what true love is! My heart is changed forever. Thank you Jesus and Life Challenge!"

P.S. Before graduating in December 2006, Peter completed his G.E.D. in our program. He is currently working full-time and plans to start college in the spring.