

RELIGION VS. THE GOSPEL

MARK 1:14-15

14 Now after that John was put in prison, Jesus came into Galilee, preaching the gospel of the kingdom of God,

15 And saying, The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God is at hand: repent ye, and believe the gospel.” ESV

Introduction

How important is the Gospel of Jesus Christ, the Son of God? It must be important because that is how Mark begins his version of the life of Christ.

Note: Mark is mentioned in the book of the Acts, and in the Epistles. In Acts 12:25, we are told that Barnabas and Paul took this Mark or John with them to go to Antioch. Later Paul and Barnabas split up with John Mark accompanying Barnabas and Silas went with Paul.

John is a Hebrew name where *Mark*, or *Marcus*, is Roman. It was customary for those Jews who had much contact with Greeks and, Romans, to assume Greek or Roman names.

History

Our passage today follows two important events in the life of Jesus. The first is His baptism at the hands of John the Baptizer (1:9-11). The second is the 40 days of temptation in the wilderness (1:12-13). As Jesus ends the wilderness temptations, He fully begins His ministry on the earth. He is tasked with spreading the gospel of the Kingdom of Heaven.

Matthew 4: 17 From that time Jesus began to preach, saying, “Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand.” ESV

What is Religion?

At its base, religion is a specific set of beliefs, convictions and practices generally agreed upon by a number of persons or sects. It is the practice of their beliefs, devotion and rituals of faith.

What is The Gospel?

In 1 Corinthians 15:1-8, the apostle Paul summarizes the message and meaning of the gospel; namely, the death, burial, resurrection, and appearances of the resurrected Christ.

1 Now I would remind you, brothers, of the gospel I preached to you, which you received, in which you stand, 2 and by which you are being saved, if you hold fast to the word I preached to you—unless you believed in vain.

3 For I delivered to you as of first importance what I also received: that Christ died for our sins in accordance with the Scriptures, 4 that he was buried, that he was raised on the third day in accordance with the Scriptures, 5 and that he appeared to Cephas, then to the twelve. 6 Then he appeared to more than five hundred brothers at one time, most of whom are still alive, though some have fallen asleep. 7 Then he appeared to James, then to all the apostles. 8 Last of all, as to one untimely born, he appeared also to me.

The crux of the passage.

It is my opinion that the church in America has quit teaching the Gospel and instead fills that void by talking about all sorts of domestic and quite frankly, worldly teachings. Many denominations instead teach a type of works-based, follow the rules message. Denominations, known for teaching and adhering to the principles and doctrines of the Bible, have replaced it with material that reads more like Newsweek or Time magazine. They have wandered far from teaching Christ and His Gospel.

Many teach, even within our own denomination, that our standing with God is based on how good we are or how bad we are on any given day. If you sift through that theology, you will be left with “works” teaching instead of Grace. Scripture clearly teaches that our standing with God is based on the righteousness of Jesus and not our righteousness. After all the prophet Isaiah made it abundantly clear that “...our righteousness are as filthy rags...” (Isaiah 64:6).

In the 1990’s there began a movement called “seeker churches.” These churches would become more accessible to people who are not church affiliated and be sensitive to their needs. While on the surface, this sounds like a great idea, the problem was that these non-Christian people brought with them the world system.

In order to attract people, many churches and their theology have changed. I would say that they have “watered down” their teaching and preaching in order not to offend, but instead to make everyone welcome and perhaps the person will stick around long enough to hear the Gospel.

Illustration

My daughter's church became a seeker church. They were informed that the church body would never speak of people being sinners as that has a negative connotation. They were to refer to them as "pre-Christian." My God have mercy on those who have fallen for this line of reasoning.

Church services have turned into 60 minute concerts with 18 minutes of preaching. The "means justifies the end" so in order to draw more people to a worshipful experience instead of "What does God say." Much of the Christianity of today is not the Christianity I was taught growing up.

I was a member of the "independent" Baptist movement for many years. While that movement is heavy on evangelism, they were shallow in their teaching of the full Gospel. They were more concerned about the length of your hair than the depth of your relationship with God. They were more concerned about a woman wearing pants than nurturing a relationship. In their view, a good Christian, was someone that met most of the criteria on their "good" list, and identifying all the bad people because they did stuff on the "bad" list.

Illustration

My first experience as a director of a young adult Sunday school class was the introduction of Monty. In the strictest sense, he should have been repulsed by the way the church treated him. Let me explain why. Monty was different and was the farthest example of what an Independent, fundamental Baptist should be.

Monty was a carefree individual that had his hair cut in a 12" afro. He had a wispy beard and mustache and quoted lyrics from rock and roll songs. His clothing was typical hippy and his apartment carried the smell of incense. He sang and played a guitar. He was quick to smile and laugh and yet he enjoyed a deep conversation on almost any subject. He was highly educated and worked hard at his job.

Many in the church could not wrap their minds around a hippy that didn't get a 6 out of 10 on their Christian model check list.

For all intents and purposes, he did not fit the "church mold." And in truth, that is a beautiful thing. Monty loved the Lord. His eyes and expression would tell you how passionate he was about serving the Lord. He wrote songs based on the Psalms. Monty's life style and love of the Lord really inspired me to want more of the Lord in my life.

The Demands of Religion

Religion commands that you do more things on the “good” list than you did on the “bad” list. So much so that when you do stuff on the “bad” list, you think, *I must not be saved. How can a person that's saved struggle like I do with sin?* And when you were good, you'd think, *Hey, I've been good, so God must be pleased with me now.* The result is that you spend your time between being in fear and good old-fashioned self-righteousness.

However, that is not the picture of Christianity that the Bible paints. The essence of our faith, the essence of Christianity, is not a list of do's and don'ts that you do your best to follow. The essence of our faith is that Christ abolished the check list. He did that on the cross. That's the gospel.

14 Now after that John was put in prison, Jesus came into Galilee, preaching the gospel of the kingdom of God, 15 And saying, The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God is at hand: repent ye, and believe the gospel.”

This is perhaps the first sermon that Jesus preaches. Look at the very first sentence of Jesus' very first sermon. Mark 1:14–15 (KJV) says,

“Now after that John was put in prison, Jesus came into Galilee, preaching the gospel of the kingdom of God, 15 And saying, The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God is at hand: repent ye, and believe the gospel.”

What Jesus did was separate Christianity from every single religion that has ever come in the history of this world with that one statement.

The first thing Jesus says is, “The time is fulfilled.” Why does He say this? In Exodus 34:6 it says the LORD is

Exodus 34:6 “...merciful and gracious, longsuffering, and abundant in goodness and truth.” KJV

The Scripture tells us that God is not just gracious, but He is also just.

Historically, we see that God consistently endures our sins. However, there will come a time when judgment is required for our sin. It says in Numbers 14:18:

Numbers 14:18 The LORD is longsuffering, and of great mercy, forgiving iniquity and transgression, and by no means clearing the guilty, visiting the iniquity of the fathers upon the children unto the third and fourth generation.

In other words, He must punish our sin. When that time comes, when His gracious endurance of our sin is over, that time is called the time of fulfillment.

Imagine for a second that you are in the first century and you hear the words from this Rabbi, a teacher out of Galilee. His message is simple but difficult to hear: “The time is fulfilled!”

82 times in the Bible this phrase is used. It means that God is ready to put into motion his will or plan.

During the days of Noah, mankind was so wicked that the Lord could no longer endure their sins, He decided he would cover the whole earth in water and destroy man. And yet, there were eight that were saved because; “Noah found grace in the eyes of the Lord” (1 Peter 3:20).

You may also remember God’s judgment of Sodom and Gomorrah. Once again, God could no longer endure their sin. Abraham and the Lord had an agreement and their agreement was that if there were 10 righteous in both cities, God would not destroy them. He judged the two cities and poured out fire and brimstone on them.

Our current world is in terrible shape. Why hasn’t God judged the world and destroyed mankind. Surely He can see the wickedness in all the earth. When is His wrath coming on us?

The Jews in the time of Christ were anxiously waiting for the Messiah to come. So if you were in the crowd that day, you might expect Jesus to finish the sentence “*The time is fulfilled!*” with “*The kingdom of God is at hand! Repent because the wrath of God is coming and He’s going to take you out!*”

Instead, Jesus finishes the line with, “...*repent ye, and believe the gospel.*”

There is hope in this Rabbi’s words. Judgment is coming, but there is a way out...”*Repent ye and believe the gospel.*”

The Scripture says that even our righteous deeds are like filthy rags in the sight of our God. All of us have fallen short of the glory of God. But Jesus walks up and says the time is fulfilled, and yes, God’s wrath is coming. But Jesus said this time is different. Jesus said God’s wrath is not going to be poured out on you. This time God’s wrath, once and for all, is going to be poured out on Me. It’s called the gospel.

Conclusion

Christianity should be different from every other religion in history. Because religion is defined by this: a person doing their best to fulfill a list of qualifications and regulations and rules and dos and don’ts, hoping that they please God.

A Christ-follower is very simply somebody who repents and believes the gospel.

Bob Crowder