

CHIP BROGDEN

THE IRRESISTIBLE KINGDOM

God's Marvelous Plan for All Things
and Its Unavoidable Fulfillment

Books by Chip Brogden

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The Church in the Wilderness

Lord of All

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Not Many Fathers

Heart of Fire

Infinite Supply

Overcoming the Dragon

THE
IRRESISTIBLE
KINGDOM

God's Marvelous Purpose
for All Things and Its
Unavoidable Fulfillment

C H I P B R O G D E N

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The Irresistible Kingdom: God's Marvelous Purpose for All Things and Its Unavoidable Fulfillment

Third Edition

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Preface

When I am intensely focused on writing I tend to lose all track of time. The daily routines of eating, drinking, sleeping, showering, and shaving tend to go by the wayside. Out of respect for my wife and children I try not to let this go on for too long. However, in the course of writing this book I would sometimes go a day or two or three without shaving. The last time I looked in the mirror I was appalled to find that some grey whiskers had managed to get mixed in with the usually dark stubble on my chin. That is when the realization hit me that I have actually *aged* while writing this book.

I have aged spiritually as well as physically. When this book was first conceived eight years ago, I only saw glimpses of what I see so clearly today. Some of those original paragraphs managed to survive through the years and make it into this final manuscript; but like Joshua and Caleb of old, those first few pages had to wander in the wilderness for a long time, waiting for the rest of the pages to join them and become part of the volume that you now hold in your hands.

My thoughts on the subject of the Kingdom of God only began to find expression after several years of praying *daily* for the Kingdom to come and the Will to be done "on earth as it is in Heaven." As I continued to pray in faith, without fully understanding what I was asking for, God entrusted more and more revelation to me. In time I began to understand that this insight into Christ and His Kingdom was not a personal possession for me to bury in the ground for safekeeping, but was a stewardship to be shared with the Body of Christ.

After eight years of storing up the bulk of this treasure, having passed through many difficult seasons that tested and

solidified my understanding of these truths, I began to sense that the Lord would have me finally make all of it available. The actual writing of it only began in earnest a few weeks ago, but even in this relatively short period of time I have witnessed new fruitfulness and growth in my knowledge of Christ and my understanding of the Kingdom of God. I thank and praise God for this and for giving me the freedom to share these insights with you. I hope that you will grow as much through reading it as I have grown through writing it.

One particular area which was transformed during the process of writing must be noted because it has an impact on the reader. By the time I finished writing this book I found that I could no longer use the word *Church* to describe the spiritual house of living stones. I have previously used the word *Church* in all my essays and audio recordings: for example, I have referred to the Church that Jesus is building, or the Early Church. Yet I found myself increasingly troubled at having to explain the differences between the Institutional Church and the Church that Jesus is building. I *knew* the difference but I could find no satisfactory way to communicate that difference consistently and effectively. We explored a number of different methods for solving this problem. Organized Religion, another phrase I have used frequently, I found to be too general. "The religious system" was also a bit too vague. We tried putting "Church" in quotes, using catchphrases like *Churchianity*, writing out *Institutional Church*, or using abbreviations such as *I.C.* to distinguish the religious system from the spiritual Body of Christ. However, all of these attempts to explain and re-explain just became more and more cumbersome.

After going around and around on this issue the Lord reminded me that He already gave us a word that we can consistently use to describe the Body of Christ: *Ekklesia*. Just as the word "Hallelujah" is a Hebrew word that means the same

thing in every language, I have come to the conclusion that the word *Ekklesia* can likewise be used as a universal term that always means the same thing: the spiritual fellowship of disciples of Jesus. I am also convinced that the word *Church* must never again be used in conjunction with anything *spiritual*. You will better appreciate the reasons why as you progress through this book.

It makes sense that one would not continue to put the same old label on *new wineskins* that contain *new wine*. We cannot expect people to readily differentiate between what is spiritual and what is carnal if we continue to use the same terms to describe two different things. As a result, the reader should be aware that whenever I use the word *Church* in this book I am referring to the outward, visible, religious structure of denominations, church buildings, and institutional organizations typical of Christendom. Popular but misleading phrases such as *Early Church*, *house church*, and even the *Invisible Church* have been eliminated altogether so that the two concepts of *Ekklesia* and *Church* are completely separated in the mind of the reader.

This brings me to an important point of clarification. Whenever I do use the word *Church* I am referring to the religious *system* and not the *people* who are part of that system. We love the people. My wife and I led and served the people within that system for sixteen years. My righteous indignation is reserved for the *system* (and the majority of the *leaders* in that system) that hinders people from growing up spiritually and coming to the full-knowledge of Christ. My words are strong, but I do not believe I have said or written anything that exceeds the passion of Christ in His denunciation of the religious Pharisees in Matthew 23.

Ironically, some who feel I am too hard on the "Religious" will probably think I am too soft on the "Sinners." I sense that God is pleased when we are as passionate for the Lost as He is, and is somewhat troubled when we lack the same resolve He has

to leave the ninety-nine sheep and go out and look for the one that is lost. I hope to convey something of the passion of the Good Shepherd as we discuss this Irresistible Kingdom. As the author, I will eventually raise questions that challenge traditional teachings on the subject of what happens to the Lost; as the reader, you will have to decide which image of God is true - what the Bible says about Him or what the Church says. As for me, I would rather be found guilty of going a little too far with the truth than coming up too short of it. If it turns out that I am wrong then the worst that will happen is I will stand before God and be disappointed to find I was too inclusive. I am willing to take that risk. That is preferable to the shame I would feel if I had to stand before Him and find I had been too *exclusive*, and had too quickly and too easily given up on the majority of mankind based on a tradition of interpretation that is not necessarily the whole truth.

You will not get far into this book before you find I constantly and frequently refer to the Scriptures. They are not reprinted and referenced just to fill up space. Each passage was carefully selected and gathered together the way a jeweler would gather precious stones and arrange them in a display case. My best interpretation of things can be flawed, but Jesus said, "The Scriptures *cannot* be broken;"¹ they will forever remain the objective standard against which all our subjective thoughts, opinions, words, impressions, and beliefs are either confirmed as truth or discredited as false. I encourage you not to lightly pass over these passages, but to look them up and pray through them as you are led. References within the text itself are footnoted for easier reading. If you find errors or mistakes in these references please be kind enough to point them out to me.

¹ Jn. 10:35

Keep in mind that when quoting Scriptures I use different translations. I do not have a preference for one or the other; all of them have strengths and all of them have weaknesses. The Scriptures are infallible in their original languages, but the subsequent translations are by no means perfect. I try to select from the ones that are the most understandable. Some translations are better than others, but I would rather have a person read the poorest translation of the Bible than never read the Bible at all. The Holy Spirit will minister life and truth even if one does not know all the nuances of Biblical translation. I do not claim to be a Hebrew or Greek scholar by any means, but I do know how to look words up in a Bible dictionary, concordance, and lexicon. These tools are even more accessible now that they are freely available online. Some of the analysis may seem tedious at first, but it has helped me to better understand God's Word and His Purpose for all things. I believe it will help you too. Having said that, I have always been suspicious of people who do not speak the original languages of the Bible yet claim to know beyond a shadow of a doubt what certain words and phrases mean. I make no such claims, and I encourage those with more understanding to double-check my exegeses and bring any errors to my attention.

I sense that only one group of people will find life, joy, encouragement, and confirmation in these pages: those who are really hungry and thirsty for the truth, regardless of the consequences. I have learned that when a man has lost everything, he has nothing else to lose by telling the truth. Keep that in mind as I systematically dismantle, attack, tear down, root out, ridicule, and destroy the idols, sacred cows, traditions of men, hypocritical attitudes, religious sensibilities, and theological beliefs which you may have unwittingly accepted as "truth." You will encounter these thunderstorms from time to time as you navigate these pages - but if you persist, the skies will clear and the sun will shine brightly again. The sky is always beautiful after a hurricane.

It does not take a great deal of intelligence to point out everything that is *wrong* with the world or wrong with the Church. That is a necessary part of my stewardship, but that by itself is not inspiring enough to continually pour out my life. My real goal is to strip away the things that hinder and distract you from seeing God's Irresistible Kingdom so that I can then build you up, encourage you, strengthen you, and establish you in the truth that is in Christ Jesus.

I would like to thank my wife Karla, along with my two daughters, for their understanding and support as I worked on this project. I will never forget all the times they managed to make do without me while I was locked away in my study like a mad scientist working on a crazy new invention. Thank you for your love and for the sacrifices you have made together with me over the years.

I would like to express my appreciation for the *ekklesia* that meets in our home. Sharing Life together with you has helped me to better understand what the Ekklesia is all about. Without your friendship I would have nothing but a vague theory of how the Body of Christ is supposed to function; thanks to you, I can say that we have truly seen it and lived it together.

I would also like to recognize and heartily thank those who pray for us and support the work we are doing. Your emails and letters of encouragement do inspire us to keep pressing forward with our principle burden: "Him we preach; warning every man and teaching every man with all wisdom, that we may present every man perfect [spiritually mature] in Christ."²

Finally, I give thanks to God and to our Lord Jesus Christ for giving me the grace and the strength to complete these pages, for "I am not worthy of the least of all the mercies, and of all the truth, which You have showed to Your servant" (Gen. 32:10a).

² Col. 1:28.

May He be increased as I am decreased. Amen. Grace be with you all.

*Chip Brogden
Louisburg, N.C.
November 2007*

Second Preface

It has been more than ten years since I first published *The Irresistible Kingdom*. It has been on my heart for some time to provide an expanded and updated version of the original book. Now that I am that much older and (hopefully) that much wiser, it seemed appropriate to also write a second preface to this new edition. I have no second thoughts about anything I have written previously; on the contrary, I am more convinced of these truths now than when I first believed and wrote. I have simply added some additional material to support the original work and to better assist the reader.

My purpose for this book remains unchanged: that I should show in these pages the preeminence of Christ and the greatness and goodness of God’s Purpose for all people. In this book I make it abundantly clear that Jesus is the only Way to the Father¹, and that “there is no other name given among men whereby we must be saved.”² I affirm my belief in the Scriptures – all of them. The sheer number of references to Scripture in this volume should persuade the reader of my conviction of the truthfulness of God’s Word as the objective standard against which all our subjective opinions are measured. Since none of us have had the privilege of physically following Jesus, sitting at His feet, and witnessing His miracles two millennia ago, Scripture remains the best, most persuasive, most reliable, and most accurate revelation of Christ that we have; for truly, the Scriptures do testify of Him.³

¹ Jn. 14:6.

² Acts 4:12.

³ Jn. 5:39.

Our real difficulty is not with Scripture itself, but with the religious who have nullified the Word of God with their tradition, teaching as commandments the doctrines of men.⁴ Jesus warned that the leaven would contaminate His Kingdom, that there would be tares sown among the wheat in the same field, bad fish mixed in with good fish in the same net, and goats mixed in with sheep in the same flock.⁵ It should come as no surprise, then, that a religion *about Jesus* has become the greatest possible hindrance to a relationship *with Jesus*.

It should also come as no surprise that, even though the Scripture cannot be broken and every word of God is pure,⁶ religious people would take these pure words of God and contaminate them with their own carnal translations, interpretations, and applications. They twisted the Scriptures not only to their own destruction⁷ but to the destruction of others, with errors of translation, errors of interpretation, and errors of application in such a way that forces a person to accept one-half of what the Bible says at the expense of the other half. It is, indeed, the spirit of religion that, like the Pharisees of old, reduces the essence of the living God to the pages of a holy book, and then makes its particular translation, interpretation, and application of that holy book into a sort of golden calf that must be idolized and can never be questioned. For too long we have allowed ourselves to be spoiled and cheated “through philosophy and empty deceit, according to the traditions of men, according to the basic principles of the world, and not according to Christ.”⁸ Often what appears to be “contrary to Scripture” or “heretical” or “dangerous” or even “blasphemous” is not offensive to God or

⁴ Mk. 7:13; 7:7.

⁵ Mt. 13; Mt. 25.

⁶ Jn. 10:35; Pro. 30:5.

⁷ 2 Pet. 3:16.

⁸ Col. 2:8.

untrue to Scripture, but is merely contrary to the religious traditions handed down over the centuries. We would do well to question those religious traditions. And yet, we are told that honest questions pertaining to translation, interpretation, and application have all been settled and decided upon long ago, and there is nothing left for us to do but accept what we have been taught as infallible. But how were these issues decided, and who decided them? Church history reveals that those opinions which were expressed the loudest, the longest, or with the most force, ultimately prevailed and became approved orthodoxy; those who held a different view were labeled as “heretics” and either banned, beaten, or burned at the stake. Had circumstances been a little different – perhaps a more persuasive, powerful, or politically-connected spokesperson advocating for the opposite side of an issue – then what we label as orthodoxy or heresy today might look entirely different.

The Word (words) of God are not greater than God and cannot replace God, just as the gift on the altar is not greater than the altar, for the altar sanctifies the gift.⁹ Jesus knew the Words of God, but more importantly, He knew the God of the Words, and was thus not enslaved to the translations, interpretations, and manipulations of religious men who sought to distort God’s words for their own purposes. I think it is no disrespect to question words written or spoken by men that are attributed to God, to ensure that God has indeed spoken; on the contrary, it seems to me that we honor God when we carefully investigate what is written and said in His Name. People can nullify the Word of God with their tradition and limit God through unbelief, but the Word of God cannot be nullified forever, and God will not be limited forever. It stands to reason that if the heaven can

⁹ Mt. 23:19.

leaven the pure lump of Christ,¹⁰ and if satan can lead many “astray from the simplicity of Christ,”¹¹ then it is equally possible that words of God (the Bible) can be corrupted, either in translation, interpretation or application. Men are fallible, biased, and imperfect.

Can we then trust the Bible? Absolutely! Surely God has preserved a kernel of truth in a remnant of overcomers, and has watched over His written Word so that, *if we accurately translate it, rightly interpret it, and correctly apply it*, we will see the truth revealed – and, we will see how often God’s truth contradicts the traditions of men. The tools for studying the Bible are few, they are not difficult to master, and they are easily accessible. More importantly, the Spirit will teach all who sincerely want to come to the full-knowledge of truth.¹² I believe anyone who sets aside a few minutes a day to pray and search the Scriptures while find the Spirit of Jesus ready to teach them. This simple approach, over time, would yield an abundance of fruit and would be so much more valuable than listening to what others say. Better to receive three of four simple but life-changing lessons in this manner than to spend years listening to sermons - or worse, dissecting God’s Word in a seminary, treating the sacred text as though it were a science specimen to be dismembered and analyzed under a microscope.

But more important than having the right tools is having the right heart for Scripture study. We study Scripture for the same reason we pray – to know God better. Without the right heart, we may search the Scriptures, thinking that “in them” we have life, and fail to recognize or touch the Living One of Whom the

¹⁰ Mt. 13:33, 16:12; 1 Cor. 5:6,7.

¹¹ 2 Cor. 11:3.

¹² Jn. 16:13; 1 Tim. 2:4.

very Scriptures we study testify of.¹³ The problem is not the Bible at all, but our own approach to it. We all have our predetermined ideas, biases, and assumptions based on what we have been taught. Rarely have we gone to the Word of God and allowed the Holy Spirit to truly lead us into all truth, allowing the truth to take us wherever it leads. We tend to let other “experts” do the translation, interpretation, and application for us, meekly accepting whatever they teach, dumbly assuming that they know more than we know. And when we hear something that does not neatly fit into our pre-determined system of belief, we tend to reject both the message and the messenger before we have thoroughly examined either.

“Confirmation bias” is that well-known quirk of human nature that causes us to give more weight to information that confirms what we already believe to be true and less weight to anything that challenges our usual thinking. This curious oddity can have serious implications when it comes to discerning spiritual truth. As Leo Tolstoy put it, “The most difficult subjects can be explained to the most slow-witted man if he has not formed any idea of them already; but the simplest thing cannot be made clear to the most intelligent man if he is firmly persuaded that he knows already, without a shadow of doubt, what is laid before him.” Economist J.K. Galbraith observed, “Faced with a choice between changing one’s mind and proving there is no need to do so, almost everyone gets busy with the proof.”

Many wise people have also observed that we do not see things as they are, but as *we* are. Based on this, I have come to a similar conclusion: Our view of God determines our experience of God. If we see God as angry, demanding, eager to punish, needing to be appeased, and Someone we should all be afraid of

¹³ Jn. 5:39.

– the sort of God that might strike you with lightning if you step out of line - then this is how we begin to experience Him. We will seek and find Scriptures to confirm our view of a scary God. We will gravitate towards beliefs, teachings, visions, dreams, and prophetic pronouncements of doom, gloom, disaster, and destruction; worse, we may even help spread the Good (Bad?) News with some apocalyptic pronouncements of our own making. We will take a kind of perverse pleasure in things like the eighteenth-century preacher Jonathan Edwards’ sermon, *Sinners in the Hands of an Angry God*. We will sense a strange attraction and resonance with all those “God is going to judge America!” visions of catastrophe, and every natural disaster confirms what we already know to be true: that God is scary and is eager to pour out judgment and destruction *on everybody else* but not on us! Of course, those who view things this way usually sit safely on the sidelines, sipping a soda and watching the Big Game unfold from the comfort of their eschatological easy chairs. Sadly, this view of God, created and sustained by a religion of fear, determines how most people experience God. Why should we care? Because not only does your view of God determine your *experience* of God, your experience of God determines your *portrayal* of Him to others. And if others view God wrongly based on how you portray Him, then their experience of God is distorted, and the vicious cycle of religion continues to spread its destructive poison and leaven.

But a different view of God would determine a different experience of God, would it not? And this view of God begins with a simple Scriptural assertion of how God really is: “God is Love.”¹⁴ From this humble yet firm foundation we begin to construct a very different view of God, and miraculously - as dawn breaks over the horizon and scatters the darkness – we

¹⁴ 1 Jn. 4:8, 16.

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begin to have a very different experience of God, and this is the God we see revealed in Scriptures. Oh, He was there all the time! But we could not see Him or fully appreciate Him, hidden as it were behind all the hellfire and brimstone spewing forth from the religious system. This is a God Who loves the world;¹⁵ Who sent His Son not to condemn the world, but to save sinners,¹⁶ heal the brokenhearted, and set the captives free, and turn them from darkness to light;¹⁷ Who is the Savior of all people, especially those who believe;¹⁸ Who desires all people to be saved;¹⁹ Who is not willing that anyone perish, but that all repent;²⁰ Whose Son died for us while we were still sinners;²¹ Who reconciled us to Himself when we were still His enemies;²² Whose grace abounds much more than our sin;²³ Who has already taken away the sin of the world;²⁴ Who is rich in mercy to all who call upon Him;²⁵ Who will pour out His Spirit on all people;²⁶ Who promises to destroy the devil, hell, and death;²⁷ Who will take away sorrow, suffering and pain and will heal the nations;²⁸ Who says He will, one day, gather together in one all

¹⁵ Jn. 3:16.

¹⁶ Jn. 3:17.

¹⁷ Lk. 4:18.

¹⁸ 1 Tim. 4:10.

¹⁹ 1 Tim. 2:4.

²⁰ 2 Pet. 3:9.

²¹ Rom. 5:8.

²² Rom. 5:10.

²³ Rom. 5:20.

²⁴ Jn. 1:29; 1 Jn. 2:2.

²⁵ Ps. 145:18; Eph. 2:4.

²⁶ Acts 2:17.

²⁷ Rev. 20:10, 14.

²⁸ Rev. 21:4; 22:2.

in Christ,²⁹ make all things new,³⁰ and create a new heavens and earth;³¹ Who refuses to condemn those whom the religious deem worthy of stoning;³² Who does not cast anyone off forever, and when He does punish, does it reluctantly, and with the purpose of correction, not destruction;³³ Who makes His sun to shine on the evil and the good, and sends rain for the just and the unjust;³⁴ Who is kind and merciful even to the unthankful and to the evil;³⁵ Who invites both bad and good to His wedding feast;³⁶ Who sends us into all the world to share this Good News (not Bad News) of a God of Love with everyone.³⁷

What a different view of God this is! And this view of God does not come from a religion *about* Jesus; it only comes from a relationship *with* Jesus. But if both views of God claim Scriptural support for their particular view, how do we discern which is correct?

Jesus gave us the answer. He said the tree is known by the fruit it produces.³⁸ The fruit of the Holy Spirit is Love,³⁹ while the fruit of the Religious Spirit is fear. “There is no fear in love, but perfect love casts out fear, because fear has torment. Whoever fears is not perfected in love.”⁴⁰ It could not be any clearer. All religion – especially the Christian religion - is based on fear, and

²⁹ Eph. 1:10.

³⁰ Rev. 21:5.

³¹ Rev. 21:1.

³² Jn. 8:11.

³³ Lam. 3:31-33.

³⁴ Mt. 5:45.

³⁵ Lk. 6:35,36.

³⁶ Mt. 22:10.

³⁷ Mk. 16:15.

³⁸ Mt. 12:33.

³⁹ Gal. 5:22.

⁴⁰ 1 Jn. 4:18.

wins converts through fear: fear of transgression, fear of excommunication, fear of judgment, fear of hell, fear of eternal punishment, and ultimately, Theophobia: a morbid fear of God Himself. The fruit of fear-based religion is legalism, formalism, hypocrisy, and pride if one can successfully overcome their moral failures; if one fails, fear-based religion leads to guilt, shame, condemnation and despair. The tree is known by its fruit.

On the other hand, Jesus offers us the potential of a relationship with God based on love. Love bears, believes, hopes, and endures all things - and Love never fails.⁴¹ Perfect love casts out fear - and without fear, there is room for the fruit of a Spirit-filled relationship with God: love, joy, peace, patience, gentleness, goodness, kindness, meekness, and self-control.⁴² What fear-based religion cannot accomplish in a lifetime of threats and punishments is easily achieved by simply surrendering our hearts to an irresistible God of Love. The tree is known by its fruit.

I do believe that there is plenty of Scriptural support to show that God wants to save all, is able to save all, and eventually will save all – **through Jesus Christ** Who is “the Savior of the world.”⁴³ I really do believe He is “the Savior of all men, especially those who believe”⁴⁴ and that eventually He will draw all men to Himself⁴⁵ and will gather together in one all in Christ.⁴⁶ This will happen, not by giving everyone a free pass and cheap grace, and not by pretending that sin does not exist or is unimportant (because it does, and it is). But if God’s grace truly

⁴¹ 1 Cor. 13:7,8.

⁴² Gal. 5:22,23.

⁴³ Jn 4:42; 1 Jn 4:14.

⁴⁴ 1 Tim. 4:10.

⁴⁵ Jn. 12:32.

⁴⁶ Eph. 1:10.

abounds greater than our sin abounds,⁴⁷ then God surely intends to demonstrate this by doing something with those we consider “lost” in such a way that they all see Him as He really is, repent, believe and not doubt anymore. Most cannot believe until they see anyway - Thomas is a notable example, and Jesus did not condemn him for doubting, but simply revealed Himself to Thomas in such a way that even doubting Thomas could see and believe.⁴⁸ One day, “Every eye will see Him.”⁴⁹ And once their eyes are opened, once they see Him clearly, without the hazy filter of fear-based religion getting in the way, they will (just like Thomas) see and believe.

I have never said that God is going to save people who do not believe and do not repent - that would take all the fun out of it! Forcing people to confess and bow down to Jesus against their will is not the way of Love, and it is not God’s way. Nor is it God’s way to simply ignore sin and give everyone a free ticket to heaven, no matter how much He may love them.

But Scripture reveals a wonderful truth somewhere in between those two extremes: that God will reveal Christ in such a way that every knee bows and every tongue *gladly* confesses the Lordship of Jesus,⁵⁰ so that all are gathered together in one in Christ;⁵¹ and in the end, God will be “All in all.”⁵² This is the one truth that outshines all others. You have sin that abounds - death and judgment is true. Another truth is that “grace does

⁴⁷ Rom. 5:20.

⁴⁸ Jn. 20:29.

⁴⁹ Rev. 1:7.

⁵⁰ Isa. 45:23; Rom. 14:11; Phil. 2:10,11. The Greek word for “confess” in Phil. 2:11 is *exomologeō*, which means to *gladly* confess, rather to reluctantly confess out of compulsion.

⁵¹ Eph. 1:10.

⁵² 1 Cor. 15:28.

much more abound.”⁵³ Mercy, reconciliation, forgiveness, long-suffering, healing of the nations, death and hell destroyed, the curse broken – these are all part of the Biblical narrative. Both judgment and mercy are true, yet one truth is preeminent over the other, and “mercy triumphs over judgment.”⁵⁴ If you focus on sin abounding, on wrath and judgment, then that truth becomes preeminent in your mind. If you focus on Christ and the truth that grace did *much more* abound then that truth becomes preeminent - not either/or, but both/and. That man has a will is true; that God's Will is greater is another truth, and that has preeminence over the other. Which one you see as “greater” depends solely on the largeness of your view of Christ – “Lord of All”⁵⁵ or Lord of Some; “Savior of All”⁵⁶ or Savior of Some.

We can hold to these promises in spite of every religious tradition to the contrary because we know that God cannot lie, and that God's Word cannot contradict itself. It requires spiritual discernment to rightly divide the Word of God and see that there is no contradiction with God, only with our interpretation of things. It is exceedingly difficult to go against the religious tradition, especially when that tradition is based on a surface-level reading of Scripture that seems very plain. Then again, we know the devil quoted Scripture to Jesus in the wilderness, taking the “plain meaning” of the text and twisting it in a way that could justify the enemy's proposal. Similarly, some will quote Scripture in their objection to the very purpose of God revealed in Scripture.

That is not surprising. The prophets clearly saw what seemed to be a confusing contradiction: on the one hand, that

⁵³ Rom. 5:20.

⁵⁴ Jam. 2:13, NKJV.

⁵⁵ Acts 10:36.

⁵⁶ 1 Tim. 4:10.

the Messiah would rule forever; and on the other hand, that He would be rejected, would suffer, and would die! What an extreme! Surely one must be right and the other must be wrong. How can you reconcile a Triumphant Messiah with a Suffering Messiah? It makes no sense! The Jews, therefore, focused on the aspect of truth that most appealed to them and failed to recognize Jesus as the fulfillment of both.

Looking back now, we see it all so clearly and we rejoice in the wisdom of God. But looking forward, we see a similar confusing contradiction: that the narrow way is such that few find it, yet somehow God will "gather together in one all in Christ" as the Good Shepherd searches and gathers the lost sheep together into one flock with one shepherd.⁵⁷ Just like the Jews, we are trained to focus on the truth that most appeals to us. As Thomas Bacon has said, "In the end, no matter the facts, man will believe the truth that most pleases him." We fail to recognize how God has always confounded the wisdom of the wise, and even the wisdom of His own people, who say both cannot be true. Even so, God is working all things after the counsel of His Will, and in the fullness of time, when His eternal purpose in Christ is fulfilled, we will see that "the things that are impossible with man are possible with God."⁵⁸

I repeat: *Our view of God determines our experience of God, and our experience of God determines our portrayal of Him to others.* As we get over our fear-based religious addiction and move towards a love-based relationship, we begin to experience this life-changing view of God that transforms our character from the inside out. It is not the failure of Christ to draw all to Him, it is the failure of our religious tradition to believe He is

⁵⁷ Lk. 19:10; Jn. 10:16.

⁵⁸ Mt. 19:26; Mk. 10:27; Lk. 18:27.

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able to subdue all to Himself⁵⁹ - not by force, but by love and mercy; not destroying the billions who cannot believe apart from God's grace, but destroying death and hell,⁶⁰ destroying the devil who deceives them,⁶¹ and even destroying the Babylonian harlot church system that perverts the truth of Jesus,⁶² eventually turning darkness to light and setting all the captives free. God's wrath and destruction is not going to be unleashed on sinners, but on the spiritual, political, socioeconomic, and religious systems of command and control that seek to deceive, steal, kill, and destroy the people Jesus died to save. The Good News is that God, in Christ, has already reconciled the world to Himself and does not impute their sins against them.⁶³ Our message now is simple: God has already reconciled you to Himself; now, you need to reconcile yourself to Him.⁶⁴ He really is the Savior of the World!

That is the Savior I proclaim – a real Savior, a real Deliverer, the best Friend a sinner could ever have,⁶⁵ someone Who loves them, cares for them, and keeps seeking and saving them however long it takes.⁶⁶ His Word, Christ, will not return to Him void but will accomplish what He sends Him forth to do.⁶⁷ And what He sent Jesus into the world to do is to save sinners and to destroy the works of the devil.⁶⁸ This is precisely what He has

⁵⁹ Phil. 3:21.

⁶⁰ Rev. 20:14.

⁶¹ Rev. 20:10.

⁶² Rev. 18:2-4.

⁶³ 2 Cor. 5:19.

⁶⁴ 2 Cor. 5:20.

⁶⁵ Lk. 7:34.

⁶⁶ Lk. 19:10.

⁶⁷ Isa. 55:11.

⁶⁸ Lk. 9:56; 1 Tim. 1:15; 1 Jn. 3:8.

done and will do, because He has never disobeyed His Father. Hallelujah!

In Christ we see that God is both willing and able to do exactly what He said He would do - in which case the Good News is even better than we thought: "As in Adam all die, so in Christ will all be made alive."⁶⁹ Clearly, we are not there yet. Evil exists because mankind exists, freely and arrogantly choosing its own way in hostile rebellion against God. There is a spiritual adversary who resists God and deceives mankind. It is even possible for us (who should know better) to resist the Holy Spirit, or to limit God through our own unbelief. But these present realities are only temporary. The Kingdom of God is an irresistible Kingdom in the sense that it will ultimately overcome all opposition. Why? Because God is Love, and Love never fails.⁷⁰

God is all-powerful but He does not use force to bring about the fulfillment of His Will. And frankly, that is why it takes so long to see His Purpose realized. Love suffers long and is patient because love does not force its own way. But we have the confident assurance that, however long love may take, love never fails.

On the other hand, evil rules by force and uses deception to get quick results. Evil does not care how it achieves its goal. It will use deception and angels of light if it serves its purpose, or it will steal, kill, and destroy if that works. Not so with the God of Love. The world would come around really quickly if God forced everyone to do what He wanted - but that is not how the Lord operates.

In the end the world will see the foolishness of evil and the wisdom of Love. Love will win them all and love will outlast their resistance. We will see that man's ability to rebel is not greater

⁶⁹ 1 Cor. 15:22.

⁷⁰ 1 Jn. 4:16; 1 Cor. 13:8.

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than God's ability to redeem. We will see that the darkness of deception cannot resist the greater light of truth. We will see that hate and fear cannot be greater than love. We can affirm the existence of all these contrary things, but we do not have to believe in their everlasting continuance. I believe all these things will be subsumed, absorbed, dissolved, and erased by this Irresistible Kingdom, a new heaven and a new earth. "Behold, I make all things new!" He says.⁷¹ And His words are true and faithful. Let God be true, and every man who says "it cannot be" a liar!⁷²

Exactly how and when this will happen, and how we can interpret it in the light of Scriptures that seem to contradict it, is a subject for another book.⁷³ For now, I simply ask you to consider the possibility that God's love is greater than we can imagine and the Good News is even better than we thought.

If grace abounds much more than sin abounds... if His mercy endures forever, and mercy triumphs over judgment... if love never fails, and love covers a multitude of sins... if all who died in Adam will live in Christ...then God's power to redeem must be greater than mankind's power to rebel, and this Irresistible Kingdom will ultimately prevail.

God is Love. God so loved the world. Love never fails. It is all so irresistibly simple.

*Chip Brogden
Louisburg, N.C.
August 2019*

⁷¹ Rev. 21:5.

⁷² Rom. 3:4.

⁷³ I address the problem of evil – and a solution to it - in *Overcoming the Dragon: The Problem of Evil and the Irresistible Purpose of God*.

Chapter One

The Gospel of the Kingdom



"And Jesus went about all Galilee, teaching in their synagogues, and preaching the Gospel of the Kingdom, and healing all manner of sickness and all manner of disease among the people." (Matthew 4:23)

What is the Gospel? The word *gospel* means "Good News." In modern parlance, it is the message of salvation – what you need to do in order to go to heaven after you die. The Good News, as most understand it today, is how to be saved, or "Born Again;" how to become a believer, a Christian. The preaching of the Gospel consists of telling people that in order to be saved they must accept Jesus Christ as their personal Savior. This brings the promise of eternal life in heaven with God after the believer dies. For some, the Good News goes even further, and their Gospel message includes God's provision for power, health, prosperity, and success for those who learn how to exercise their faith.

Of course, if you do not "pray the Sinner's Prayer," if you do not accept Jesus as your personal savior, then this Good News becomes Bad News; your eternal destiny is to burn in hell along with all the other unbelievers.

But this summary of "the Gospel" gives rise to several questions that beg to be answered. We hear what is preached and proclaimed today as "the Gospel." But is *this* the Gospel that Jesus preached? Is *this* the Gospel that the apostles preached? Is *this* what the early Ekklesia¹ understood the Gospel to be? Was the Gospel, to them, anything more than the issue of heaven and hell?

Is it possible that some two thousand years after Jesus began to share His Good News we have missed the point? Is it possible that we have added to the original message? Is it possible that we have subtracted from the original message? If we have missed the point, and the Gospel we preach is somehow faulty, or lacking something, would this not explain the lack of faith, and power, and holiness among many professing Christians today?

What if we could go back to the Scriptures and discover the real meaning behind everything – the true message of the Gospel, the whole counsel of God, the ultimate purpose and thought and intention behind everything God has done, is doing, and will do?

The purpose of this book is to do that very thing. When we really look at what the Bible says and grasp the implications of the Gospel according to Jesus then we soon discover that this Good News is better than we could have ever dared to hope. It is a story of recovering something that was once thought to be totally lost, redeeming something that was once thought to be absolutely hopeless. It is a story of God bringing something wonderfully good out of something terribly evil. It is a story of God bringing life and light out of so much death and darkness. It

¹ In this book the word *Church* will always be used in reference to the visible structure of the Christian religious system and will never be used in any spiritual context. The term *Ekklesia* is used to describe the invisible spiritual fellowship of all disciples of Jesus, both universally and locally. Please see the author's preface for an explanation of why this is necessary. *The Ekklesia* will be elaborated upon in Chapters 8 and 9.

is a story of love, and the incredible lengths to which that love will go to secure the object of its affection.

The Gospel is more, so much more, than how to avoid hell and go to heaven; it is the story of an Idea, a Purpose, an Intention, a Plan, which is working itself out in this universe even as you sit here reading these words.

This Ultimate Purpose can be summed up into a single thought, a central idea, that you find weaving its way throughout the Bible and throughout human history. It is the theme of Jesus, the preaching of the apostles, and the understanding with which those first believers became followers of Christ. And this understanding of God's Ultimate Purpose and Intention finds expression in something that the Bible refers to as *The Kingdom of God*.² At the center of this Kingdom of God is a Person. Everything that God has done, is doing, and will do is centered around this Person. The Bible says that all things come from Him, through Him, and unto Him.³ This Person is the Lord Jesus Christ.

It is God's Will that the King and His Kingdom fill all things with His Light, His Love, and His Life; and so this Kingdom is constantly growing, expanding, and increasing. There are elements in this universe that try to resist this increasing. Although they can delay or hinder the Kingdom, they cannot stop its increase.

² A comparison of the terms "Kingdom of Heaven" and "Kingdom of God" shows that what Matthew called the "Kingdom of Heaven" the other Gospel writers called the "Kingdom of God." Since the same parables used to describe Matthew's "Kingdom of Heaven" are also used to describe Mark and Luke's "Kingdom of God", there is no Scriptural basis for teaching that these are two separate ideas. For the most obvious example, compare Matthew 13 with Mark 4 and Lk. 8.

³ Rom. 11:36.

A Kingdom That Fills the Earth

As we find out what the Bible has to say about this Person, and the Kingdom that surrounds Him, we will come to the conclusion that this is an *Irresistible Kingdom*. For example, the Book of Daniel provides us with remarkable insight into this irresistible Kingdom of God:

You watched as a stone was cut out without hands, which struck the statue upon its feet that were of iron and clay, and broke them to pieces. Then was the iron, the clay, the brass, the silver, and the gold, broken to pieces together, and became like the chaff of the summer threshing floors; and the wind carried them away, that no place was found for them: and the stone that broke the image became a great mountain, and filled the whole earth... And in the days of these kings shall the God of Heaven set up a Kingdom, which shall never be destroyed: and the Kingdom shall not be left to other people, but it shall break in pieces and consume all these kingdoms, and it shall stand for ever. (Dan. 2:34,35,44)

The rise and fall of the major world powers were described as a great statue made of different materials. The head of gold represented the Babylonian empire. The chest and arms of silver represented the Persian empire. The belly and thighs of brass represented the Grecian empire. The legs of iron and the feet of iron and clay represented the Roman empire. This information is so well known and documented that Bible scholars and historians simply take it for granted.

But the true significance of this statue is not that it provides us with a prophetic declaration of the rise and fall of earthly powers. After all these kingdoms comes another Kingdom. This Kingdom is what we want to focus our attention on, for this Kingdom is very different from the others. Whereas those other kingdoms arose one after another and added something of their own to the statue, this final Kingdom comes *from the outside* and destroys the statue. We see that this particular Kingdom is

unique in that it has nothing to do with the statue at all. It is a Stone; and not just any old stone, but a Stone "made without hands."

Even more fascinating is how this Kingdom interacts with the other kingdoms. First it completely and totally destroys the statue and scatters its pieces so completely that there is "no place" found for them. Next, this Stone becomes a great mountain, and eventually, this Stone which destroyed the statue and became a mountain *fills the whole earth*.

The simple explanation is that God will establish an Irresistible Kingdom on the earth. This Kingdom does not rise up from the earth, but it comes down from heaven. This Kingdom will break to pieces and consume all the other kingdoms. And this Kingdom will increase from a single stone into a great mountain that fills the entire earth. It is an Irresistible Kingdom! Not only can this Kingdom not be stopped, but when people see the King for Who He really is, they no longer desire to resist Him. This is why the Irresistible Kingdom continues to grow and expand, so that eventually the King and His Kingdom "fill all things."⁴

The Gospel According to Jesus

The idea of a Kingdom to come was an inherently Jewish hope for hundreds of years. This Kingdom (according to the prophets) would be ruled by a deliverer and savior of the people, who would restore Israel to its rightful place of ascendancy among the nations of the world. This ruler was known as the Messiah.

Finally, after so many centuries of waiting, the Messiah arrived. Of course they did not realize that He was the Messiah,

⁴ Eph. 1:23; 4:10.

and so they could not fully appreciate the significance of His ministry. For our part we can look to the record of Scripture and see what manner of Man He was.

Of particular interest would be the first thing He said. The Son of God lived in relative obscurity for the first thirty of His thirty-three years on earth, waiting for the right time. Finally the time came, and He began to preach His Good News. We are thankful that He came bearing Good News, Glad Tidings, instead of Bad News! Given the state of things in which He found Himself in, the fact that He brought Good News is amazing in and of itself.

So what was this Good News? Specifically, when Jesus finally began to preach at the age of thirty, what was His theme? Salvation? Health and wealth? The need for revival? A scholarly dissertation from the Hebrew Scriptures? A declaration of Himself as the Son of God, and a demand that all Israel recognize Him as such? We do not have to speculate as to the substance of the beginning of His preaching:

- From that time on, Jesus began to preach, and to say, "Repent: for the Kingdom of Heaven is at hand." (Mt. 4:17)
- Now after that John was put into prison, Jesus came into Galilee, preaching the Gospel of the Kingdom of God, and saying, "The time is fulfilled, and the Kingdom of God is at hand: repent ye, and believe the Gospel." (Mk. 1:14,15)
- And [Jesus] said unto them, "I must preach the Kingdom of God to other cities also: for therefore am I sent." (Lk. 4:43)

Thus began the mission and message of Jesus, with the Kingdom of God as the fundamental theme.

The Beatitudes: A Manifesto for the Irresistible Kingdom

And seeing the multitudes, [Jesus] went up on a mountain, and when He was seated, His disciples came to Him. Then He opened His mouth and taught them, saying... (Mt. 5:1,2)

In time, Jesus would get more specific about the true nature and character of His Kingdom. The Book of Matthew has been called the Book of the King and His Kingdom with good cause. Matthew documented more about the Kingdom of God than all the other Gospel writers put together. The bulk of the Kingdom parables and teachings are gathered together in Matthew. It is no coincidence that the Book of Matthew is the first book in the New Testament, and that Matthew's Gospel is presented before the other three Gospels. No doubt the Holy Spirit had a hand in arranging the order of our New Testament. The message is that *the King and His Kingdom are foundational to everything that follows after.*

The first recorded in-depth teaching of Christ is found in Matthew and is commonly referred to as the Sermon on the Mount. It is the earliest documentation we have of the essence of Jesus' teachings. Not surprisingly, the Kingdom of God is referred to consistently and frequently. In fact, the first statement made gives reference to the Kingdom: "Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the Kingdom of Heaven."⁵ Almost immediately following this Kingdom beatitude comes another one: "Blessed are they which are persecuted for righteousness' sake: for theirs is the Kingdom of Heaven."⁶

⁵ Mt. 5:3.

⁶ Mt. 5:10.

In this relatively short "sermon" from the Book of Matthew, chapters 5-7, much can be gleaned concerning this Irresistible Kingdom. Some things we rather expect, while other things are quite disturbing. There is some manner of *order* in this Kingdom, with some considered "great" and some considered "least" (5:19). One may *enter* the Kingdom only with a true righteousness; hypocrites are not allowed (5:20). We are to *pray daily* for the Kingdom to come and the Will of God to be done "on earth, as it is in Heaven," and acknowledge that the Kingdom, the power, and the glory belong to God (6:10,13). We are to *seek first* the Kingdom of God (6:33). Most troubling is the assertion that merely *calling* Jesus "Lord, Lord" is not enough to enter the Kingdom; actually *doing* the will of God is a necessary requirement (7:21).

These are the direct references to the Kingdom; the overall sense of the Sermon on the Mount was that a new order of things had arrived. The law of Moses, contained within the Old Covenant, primarily focused on the outward behavior; in this Kingdom of God, *inward purity* carried more weight. Jesus showed that scrupulous observance of religious things neither was, nor is, the point; character, moral authority, and spiritual maturity is what God is really after.⁷ "That you may be the children of your Father which is in heaven"⁸ means more than being able to trace your earthly lineage back to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, for John the Baptist declared that, "God can raise up children for Abraham out of these stones."⁹ Having God for your Father meant actually bearing some resemblance to Him in word, in character, in deed, in spiritual constitution. It was something more than possessing His written commandments, it

⁷ Indeed, the Old Testament command that "You shall love the Lord your God with all your *heart*, soul, and might" (Deut. 6:5) shows that even in the midst of so much Jewish ritual God was (and still is) concerned for the heart.

⁸ Mt. 5:45.

⁹ Lk. 3:8b.

was being recognized as having something of His Own Light, Life, and Love; His very nature.

The Irresistible Kingdom Parables

A study of the teachings of Jesus reveals that His primary theme was the Kingdom of God.¹⁰ Jesus constantly used parables (short, allegorical stories) to illustrate His Kingdom. Here is a sampling from the Book of Matthew only:

- The Kingdom of Heaven is like a man which sowed good seed in his field... (Mt. 13:24)
- The Kingdom of Heaven is like a grain of mustard seed... (Mt. 13:31)
- The Kingdom of Heaven is like leaven... (Mt. 13:33)
- The Kingdom of Heaven is like treasure hid in a field... (Mt. 13:44)
- The Kingdom of Heaven is like a merchant man, seeking goodly pearls... (Mt. 13:45)
- The Kingdom of Heaven is like a net, that was cast into the sea... (Mt. 13:47)

¹⁰ Based upon the fact that the Kingdom of God / Kingdom of Heaven is the stated theme of Jesus' preaching, or is specifically referenced by Him while teaching, approximately 106 times in the Gospels. By way of an interesting comparison, Jesus discussed "love" (loving God, loving your neighbor, loving your enemies, or lack of love) approximately 40 times, while "salvation" and "saved" are alluded to only 15 times.

- The Kingdom of Heaven is like a man that is a householder... (Mt. 13:52)
- The Kingdom of Heaven is like a certain king, which would take account of his servants... (Mt. 18:23)
- The Kingdom of Heaven is like a certain king, which made a marriage for his son... (Mt. 22:2)
- Then shall the Kingdom of Heaven be like ten virgins... (Mt. 25:1)
- For the Kingdom of Heaven is as a man travelling into a far country... (Mt. 25:14)

The parables are not quaint little stories; they are prophetic declarations of spiritual truth, and they give us invaluable insight into this Irresistible Kingdom.¹¹ Concealing the truth within the context of a parable was necessary, Jesus said, "Because it is given unto you [the disciples] to know the mysteries of the kingdom of heaven, but to them [the rest of the people] it is not given."¹² Those who want to understand the mysteries of the *Kingdom* have to have a relationship with the *King*. The mysteries of the Kingdom are reserved, not for passive listeners, but for true followers: so "when they were alone, He expounded all things to His disciples."¹³

¹¹ An in-depth analysis of the parables of Jesus is beyond the scope of this book; however, they are so critical to our understanding of the Kingdom of God that we plan to expound upon them individually in a subsequent publication.

¹² Mt. 13:11.

¹³ Mk. 4:34.

Disciples of the Irresistible Kingdom

Of course, this Kingdom is *of* God, and *from* God. But one astounding aspect of this Kingdom is that the King is willing to *share* His Kingdom with His people. In a very real sense, it is *our* Kingdom - belonging to Christ and belonging to us. The implications are staggering:

- Blessed are the poor in spirit: for *theirs* is the Kingdom of Heaven. (Mt. 5:3)
- Blessed are they which are persecuted for righteousness' sake: for *theirs* is the Kingdom of Heaven. (Mt. 5:10)
- And I will give *unto you* the keys of the Kingdom of Heaven... (Mt. 16:19a)
- Then shall the King say unto them on His right hand, "Come, you who are blessed of My Father, inherit the Kingdom *prepared for you* from the foundation of the world..." (Mt. 25:34)
- Fear not, little flock; for it is your Father's good pleasure to *give you* the Kingdom. (Lk. 12:32)
- And I *appoint unto you* a Kingdom, as My Father has appointed unto Me. (Lk. 22:29)
- Do you not know that *the saints shall judge the world?* and if the world shall be judged by you, are you unworthy to judge the smallest matters? (1 Cor. 6:2)

- But you are... a *royal* priesthood. (1 Pet. 2:9ff)
- To him that overcomes will I grant to *sit with Me in My throne*, even as I also overcame, and am set down with My Father in His throne. (Rev. 3:21)
- [The Lamb, Christ] *has made us* unto our God kings and priests: and *we shall reign* on the earth. (Rev. 5:10)

When viewed from the perspective of the Irresistible Kingdom, it seems obvious that discipleship is partly a training program for governing together with Christ in a future age. Far from being passive spectators, disciples are called to be active participants in this Kingdom. If we do not learn our lessons *here* then we will miss out on something *there*.

As their training progressed, Jesus gave specific instructions to His disciples about the focus of their ministry. What were they supposed to talk about when they went forth? Was their Gospel message different from Jesus' message, or was it an extension of the original message?

It is apparent that the disciples were commissioned to go forth as ambassadors, representing the same Kingdom that Jesus Himself declared. In addition to praying daily for the Kingdom to come, the disciples were instructed to actually *make known* the coming of the Kingdom, and *demonstrate proof* of its coming. The evidence that the Kingdom was near was given in a very straightforward, practical manner: "Heal the sick, cleanse the lepers, raise the dead, cast out devils."¹⁴ The sending forth was always done under the auspices of announcing a Kingdom.

- And as you go, preach, saying, *The Kingdom of Heaven is at hand*. (Mt. 10:7)

¹⁴ Mt. 10:8.

- And He sent them *to preach the Kingdom of God*, and to heal the sick. (Lk. 9:2)
- And heal the sick that are therein, and say unto them, *The Kingdom of God is come near to you.* (Lk 10:9)

No doubt there were many who heard this message and, seeing the accompanying signs and wonders, began to think of joining the disciples. Jesus used the idea of a Kingdom to challenge those who wavered:

And [Jesus] said to another, "Follow Me." But he said, "Lord, suffer me first to go and bury my father." Jesus said unto him, "Let the dead bury their dead: but *you go and preach the Kingdom of God.*" And another also said, "Lord, I will follow You; but let me first go bid them farewell, which are at home at my house. " And Jesus said to him, "No man, having put his hand to the plough, and looking back, is *fit for the Kingdom of God.*" (Lk. 9:59-62)

The King Rejected, Murdered, and Raised

Alas, in spite of all the miracles and teachings about the Irresistible Kingdom, the King was despised and rejected. A city that welcomed Him on *their* terms would quickly reject Him when He presented them with *His* terms.¹⁵ A nervous Pilate interrogated his subject thoroughly: "Are You the King of the

¹⁵ See Mk. 11:10. Jerusalem received Jesus with shouts that the kingdom had come. When this failed to happen *as expected* the same crowds who shouted "Hosanna!" would soon cry "Crucify Him!"

Jews? Are You a King?"¹⁶ Jesus confirmed that He is indeed a King, but declared that His Kingdom is not of this world.¹⁷

How ironic that the thief crucified next to Jesus was able to perceive what others could not, and said, "Lord, remember me when You come into Your Kingdom."¹⁸ This simple acknowledgement was enough to secure from Jesus the promise of being with Him in Paradise.¹⁹

After the resurrection of Jesus, He did not immediately return to heaven. Instead, He remained forty more days on the earth, spending time with His disciples. Now consider: He *began* His earthly ministry preaching the Gospel of the Kingdom. The Kingdom was the core of His teachings *during* His brief ministry of three and a half years. How do you think He would *end* His season on the earth?

There were certainly many things that the disciples needed (or wanted) to know. With the realization that Jesus was leaving them to go to the Father, the disciples would have been understandably concerned. What do we do now? How do we go about this? Where do we begin? There were many questions, to be sure. Jesus might have taught them how to plant, organize and govern churches, or how to raise support for their missionary journeys. But the Teacher continued to teach along the same lines as always, and essentially re-aligned them back to their original message:

[Jesus] showed Himself alive after His suffering by many infallible proofs, being seen of them forty days, and speaking of things pertaining to the Kingdom of God. (Acts 1:3)

¹⁶ Jn. 18:33,37.

¹⁷ Jn. 18:36.

¹⁸ Lk. 23:42.

¹⁹ Lk. 23:43.

And so we see a consistent theme. From beginning to end, right up until His ascension, the passionate subject of Jesus Christ was *the Kingdom of God*.

When Jesus finally did send them forth to "go into all the world and preach the *Gospel* to every creature"²⁰ this was not a strange new thing for which they were unprepared. They understood (better than ever before) what the *Gospel* was because Jesus had already given them their mission long before He sent them forth. It was not just preaching something in a general sort of way and calling it the "Gospel." It was a Kingdom Gospel: "This *Gospel of the Kingdom* shall be preached in all the world for a witness unto all nations; and then shall the end come."²¹

The Early Christians and the Irresistible Kingdom

Did the disciples learn these lessons? Were they able to pass them on to others? We find the answers in the Book of Acts and in the letters those disciples (now called apostles) wrote to young assemblies of believers. The apparent lack of explicit references to "the Kingdom" is understandable, given that the Roman government took a dim view of anyone spreading messages about any king other than Caesar, or any kingdom other than Rome's (particularly in the tumultuous land of Palestine). But the evidence is there nonetheless, and it is clear that they continued to teach and preach what Jesus taught and preached - the Kingdom of God.

- When they believed Philip *preaching the things concerning the Kingdom of God*, and the name of

²⁰ Mk. 16:15.

²¹ Mt. 24:14.

Jesus Christ, they were baptized, both men and women. (Acts 8:12)

- Confirming the souls of the disciples, and exhorting them to continue in the faith, and that we must through much tribulation *enter the Kingdom of God*. (Acts 14:22)
- And [Paul] went into the synagogue, and spoke boldly for the space of three months, disputing and persuading *the things concerning the Kingdom of God* (Acts 19:8).
- And now behold, I know that ye all, among who *I have gone preaching the Kingdom of God*, shall see my face no more. (Acts 20:25)
- "...there came many to [Paul] into his lodging; to whom *he expounded and testified the Kingdom of God, persuading them concerning Jesus*, both out of the law of Moses, and out of the prophets, from morning til evening. (Acts 28:23)
- *Preaching the Kingdom of God, and teaching those things which concern the Lord Jesus Christ*, with all confidence, no man forbidding him. (Acts 28:31)

As we move through the New Testament and delve into the apostolic teachings and letters written to the young Ekklesias of Christ, we find the Kingdom of God is the underlying theme that gives hope, courage, power for living a holy life, and strength to keep pressing on. The idea of an *inheritance* is used quite frequently, and the understanding was that they had *only just begun* to taste something that would be theirs in fullness at some point in the future - provided they lived a life *worthy* of that

inheritance. The presence of the Holy Spirit in the disciple of Jesus was considered an "earnest of the inheritance;"²² that is to say, a *deposit*, or an *advance* drawn upon that future inheritance and given to the heirs as proof of something greater that is currently held *in trust* for them until they come of age.

This gives some context for the subsequent instructions regarding the conduct of those who claim to be followers of Christ. The Inheritance is an indirect reference to the Kingdom, also described as a *reward*. Jesus taught, and the apostles later confirmed, that this Inheritance could be *lost* through conduct unbecoming of an heir.²³ The promises were conditioned upon a life that reflected obedience to the King *in advance* of the final revealing of His Kingdom. In other words, *character*, not pedigree, would be the determining factor.

Consider the following examples:

- And now, brethren, I commend you to God, and to the word of His grace, which is able to build you up, and to give you an *inheritance* among all them which are sanctified. (Acts 20:32)

- To open their eyes, and to turn them from darkness to light, and from the power of satan unto God, that they may receive forgiveness of sins, and *inheritance* among them which are sanctified by faith that is in Me. (Acts 26:18)

²² 2 Cor. 1:22; 5:5; Eph. 1:14.

²³ Unfaithful stewards; wicked, lazy, unprofitable servants; foolish virgins; unfruitful fruit trees; all these are parabolic examples of this loss.

- And if children, then *heirs*; heirs of God, and *joint-heirs with Christ*; if so be that we suffer with Him, that we may be also *glorified together*. (Rom. 8:17)
- Know you not that the unrighteous *shall not inherit* the Kingdom of God? (1 Cor. 6:9)
- And if you be Christ's, then you are Abraham's seed, and *heirs according to the promise*. (Gal. 3:29)
- Wherefore you are no more a servant, but a *son*; and if a son, then an *heir* of God through Christ. (Gal. 4:7)
- Envyings, murders, drunkenness, revellings, and such like: of which I tell you before, as I have also told you in time past, that they which do such things *shall not inherit* the Kingdom of God. (Gal. 5:21)
- In Whom also we have obtained an *inheritance*, being predestinated according to the purpose of Him who works all things after the counsel of His Own will... (Eph. 1:11)
- Which is the earnest of our *inheritance* until the redemption of the purchased possession, unto the praise of His glory. (Eph. 1:14)
- The eyes of your understanding being enlightened; that you may know what is the hope of His calling, and what the riches of the glory of His *inheritance* in the saints... (Eph. 1:18)
- For this ye know, that no whoremonger, nor unclean person, nor covetous man, who is an idolater, *has any*

inheritance in the kingdom of Christ and of God.
(Eph. 5:5)

- Giving thanks unto the Father, which has made us meet to be *partakers of the inheritance* of the saints in light... (Col. 1:12)
- Let no man beguile you of your *reward*... (Col. 2:18)
- Knowing that of the Lord you shall receive *the reward of the inheritance*: for you serve the Lord Christ. (Col. 3:24)
- That you would *walk worthy* of God, Who has called you unto His Kingdom and glory. (1 Thess. 2:12)
- That you may be *counted worthy* of the Kingdom of God, for which you also suffer... (2 Thess. 1:5)
- That being justified by His grace, we should be made *heirs* according to the hope of eternal life. (Tit. 3:7)
- That you be not slothful, but followers of them who through faith and patience *inherit the promises*. (Heb. 6:12)
- And for this cause He is the mediator of the new testament, that by means of death... they which are called might *receive the promise of eternal inheritance*. (Heb. 9:15ff)
- Cast not away therefore your confidence, which has great recompense of *reward*. (Heb. 10:35)

- Wherefore we *receiving a Kingdom* which cannot be moved, let us have grace, whereby we may serve God acceptably with reverence and godly fear. (Heb. 12:28)
- Hear, my beloved brethren, has not God chosen the poor of this world rich in faith, and *heirs of the kingdom* which He has *promised* to them that love Him? (Jam. 2:5)
- To an *inheritance* incorruptible, and undefiled, and that fades not away, *reserved* in heaven for you. (1 Pet. 1:4)
- For so an *entrance* shall be ministered to you abundantly into the *everlasting Kingdom* of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ. (2 Pet. 1:11)
- Look to yourselves, that we lose not those things which we have wrought, but that we *receive a full reward*. (2 Jn. 8)
- He that *overcomes* shall *inherit* all things; and I will be his God, and He shall be My son. (Rev. 21:7)
- And, behold, I come quickly; and My *reward* is with Me, to give every man according as his work shall be. (Rev. 22:12)

The sheer volume of Scriptures cited above demonstrates the prominent place this Kingdom was given in the teachings of Jesus, the ministry of the apostles, and the day-to-day lives of the early believers. When Jesus said, "Many are called, but few

are chosen,"²⁴ it is increasingly clear why the Chosen Few were *chosen* in the first place. Their selection was not the result of some mysterious act of predestination over which they had no control; but they were chosen precisely because, out of the many who are called, they were the few who sufficiently prepared themselves to walk worthy of that calling and did not take the King or His Kingdom for granted.

The Gospel According to "Churchianity" Today

Ask a Christian to explain the Kingdom of God to you (as I have), and you will get a variety of different answers. Most cannot answer at all. Some will say it is Heaven, which has become something of a celestial rest home for dearly departed saints. Others will answer that the Kingdom of God refers to a future period of time in which Jesus will reign on the earth for one thousand years. Still others will answer with the Scripture that says the Kingdom of God is within you, but will be unable to articulate anything about it beyond quoting the verse.

How is it possible that with all the preaching of "the Gospel" we can still remain so vague and uninformed about the Kingdom of God? When Jesus says, "This Gospel of the Kingdom shall be preached in all the world for a witness unto all nations; and then shall the end come,"²⁵ is it possible that the end is delayed precisely because we have not, and we do not, preach the Gospel of the Kingdom? Is it possible that we do not preach the Gospel of the Kingdom because we do not know what it is? If not, why not? Would a more accurate understanding of the Kingdom of

²⁴ Mt. 22:14. In addition, Rev. 17:14 says they who are with the King of Kings are "called, and chosen, *and faithful*."

²⁵ Mt. 24:14.

God change our preaching and hasten the end of this age and the beginning of a new one?

With the Biblical record before us, compare what those early disciples believed and preached to what we see and hear being taught and demonstrated in the name of Jesus today. If someone from the apostolic age were to visit our generation, take an account of our lives, document what we preach, and survey what we listen to and currently accept as "The Gospel," how would they respond? Would they be able to say that we preach the Gospel of the Kingdom? Could they report back to their first century friends that we teach the same things they taught concerning the Lord Jesus Christ and the Kingdom of God? Or would they weep and lament at how the *Church* has distorted the original message of the *Ekklesia*?

Perhaps that first century believer, wiping away the tears of disappointment, would remember that this progressive compromise and corruption was actually predicted by Jesus Himself (in the Irresistible Kingdom parables), and that these hindrances to the Kingdom would eventually be swept away in the fires of a judgment that would "begin with the house of the God."²⁶

But do twenty-first century believers know this - or even care? It is more probable that we have spent the majority of our time as Christians preaching and listening to teaching that has little, if anything, to do with the Kingdom of God. As a result, the Body of Christ suffers loss, the Harvest goes unharvested, and the Kingdom of God is unnecessarily hindered and delayed.

Seeking a Kingdom Nobody Talks About

Jesus said, "Seek first the Kingdom of God."²⁷ The Kingdom of God is central to the Gospel according to Jesus, so it is the first

²⁶ 1 Pet. 4:17.

²⁷ Mt. 6:33.

thing He tells us to seek. All the other things will be added to us once this foundational understanding is embraced. But without this foundational understanding, this elementary comprehension, can we really hope and expect to gain anything else? And if we do not know what this Kingdom of God really is, how can we seek it at all?

When something is close to our heart then it naturally becomes the substance of our praying. We certainly know how to pray for daily bread because we are conscious of our needs. But just as important, and before we ask for daily bread, Jesus taught us to pray: "Your Kingdom come, Your Will be done, on earth as it is in heaven."²⁸ How can we pray this if we are unclear as to what, precisely, this Kingdom and this Will consists of?

Is there a way to know with certainty what this Kingdom is? Absolutely! Jesus would never tell us to seek first the Kingdom of God, and to pray daily for the Kingdom to come, without telling us exactly what that Kingdom consists of. What is its nature and character? What is its purpose and reason for being? Where is it? Who may enter it, and how? Who is excluded from it, and why? How is this Kingdom organized and governed? How does it function and operate? What resists it and prevents it from coming? What will it look like when it is fulfilled? What impact will it have on the earth? What are the implications for mankind? And how can we prepare ourselves for it?

These are all good questions. The answers are revealed in the Scriptures, and the purpose of this book is to explore these questions and answers together. Our goal is to set before you God's Vision for all things - to illustrate and illuminate His Eternal Purpose - because you, dear reader, are an important part of that great Purpose of God.

²⁸ Mt. 6:10.

Before We Begin: Some Mental Hurdles to Overcome

As you prepare your heart to receive something spiritually from these pages, it will be helpful to address some of the more common stumbling blocks to understanding the true nature of the Kingdom. These hurdles are primarily mental: our usual way of thinking; the traditions of men; the library of information and disinformation we have already digested on the subject; the little voice in the back of your head that keeps saying, "What about this? What about that?" All these things I encourage you to set aside (at least for the time being) as you read and ponder this Irresistible Kingdom with an open heart and mind. You may find that in the end your questions are answered, or the things you had questions about are no longer as important as you thought they were.

Specifically, there are three areas of faulty thinking that we should be especially mindful of in the context of the Kingdom of God if we intend to grasp it. They are:

1) *Arbitrarily dividing the Gospel from the Kingdom.* The extraordinary Biblical record shows not only the prominence the Kingdom of God had in the teachings of Jesus, but the fact that "the Gospel" is utterly connected to "the Kingdom." We have shown that there is no Gospel that stands alone and apart from the Kingdom. Jesus came into Galilee "preaching the Gospel of the Kingdom of God." The Kingdom of God is what makes the Gospel the *Gospel*. It is the Good News concerning the King and His Kingdom.

This is very significant, because it raises an important issue. If the Gospel as it is preached today scarcely mentions the Kingdom of God (or, if it misrepresents and misleads people with respect to the Kingdom), is it really the Gospel? From a Scriptural perspective, the Kingdom of God is what makes the Gospel the Gospel. But few people today can really articulate what the Kingdom of God is, where it is, or what it means. It is

hardly mentioned in what is called "Full Gospel" preaching. If mentioned at all it is only in passing.

It seems clear that we have settled for something less than the Kingdom; and if that is the case, then the Gospel we preach is not really the Gospel. If we are lacking something in our presentation of the Gospel then the people who hear it will go lacking as well. An erroneous, immature Gospel message results in erroneous, immature believers - who (when the truth is eventually revealed) may not even be real believers after all.

2) *Arbitrarily dividing the King from the Kingdom.* The Kingdom is not some "thing" sitting out there somewhere, disconnected and detached from the Person of Christ Himself. It is possible to enter the United Kingdom, live there as a citizen all your life, and never even meet Queen Elizabeth (much less have a relationship with her); but it is impossible to enter the Kingdom of God without knowing Christ the King. The Kingdom is Christ, and Christ is the Kingdom. Let us not make the mistake of seeking Kingdom "things" and forgetting the One through Whom the "things" come into being in the first place.

Neither is the Kingdom of God something that we go out and build on the earth "for" Jesus. This is where keen discernment is especially needed. There are many so-called Kingdom teachings available to the Body of Christ, but upon close examination you find they are driven by a carnal self-centeredness that focuses, not on Christ, but on how great the Church is, and how powerful believers are - or should be.²⁹ The end result is not a spiritual

²⁹ These teachings go by many names, including Kingdom Now, Manifest Sons of God, Latter Rain, etc. Elements of these teachings can be found in a number of apostolic/prophetic movements. Even the Jehovah's Witnesses and the Mormons place a certain amount of emphasis on "the Kingdom." The basic flaw in all the above teachings is the centrality of *man*: what *man* is entitled to, and how *man* can go about to secure something for himself. The resulting infatuation with power, authority,

Kingdom at all; spirituality is only a guise for its real goal: political power. Some even go so far as to say that the Church is Christ; not only in sharing His nature and life, but sharing His divinity and deity as well! While the Scriptures are clear that we *are* one Body, there is an important differentiation between the Head and the Body, the Vine and the Branches, the Bride and the Groom. The failure to recognize and preserve this Otherness and preeminence of Christ, has led to minimizing Christ and elevating man - which in turn has resulted in the lack of reverence which characterizes this day and age.

Let the reader understand that we have no intention of lifting up "the Kingdom" as some kind of goal to be achieved through fleshly power, or as something distinct from, and unassociated with, Christ Himself. The Kingdom reflects the nature and character of its King, and it is the King that makes the Kingdom worth anything. Please eliminate from your mind any idea of "rising up" or "claiming your inheritance" or lording over saints and sinners or getting elected to political office. This Kingdom of which we are privileged to enter does not revolve around *you*; it revolves around *Him*.

3) *Elevating "the Church" above "the Kingdom."* As we journey towards the Irresistible Kingdom we discover that the idea of a Kingdom goes beyond the rather small realm of any local religious institution. The Kingdom is not easily seen, but Churches are seen everywhere. As a result, some have spent their whole lives focused on their church, their group, their meeting place, their denomination. But Church *is not* the Kingdom of God, and Church *is not* the Ekklesia.

It requires a Kingdom perspective to really grasp what the Ekklesia is here for, and what the Ekklesia is supposed to do. When we see just how encompassing the Kingdom of God really is, then we can more readily grasp the mission of the Ekklesia,

control, and position is the antithesis of the Irresistible Kingdom in which Christ (not man) is the governing center.

and it will also help us to distinguish between that and the false system of religious worship that calls itself Church. To attempt to address these issues apart from a foundational understanding of the Kingdom of God would be premature. The Ekklesia is an extension of the Irresistible Kingdom. It has no identity, no mission, no purpose outside of a Kingdom purpose. First we will establish what that Kingdom *is*, and then we can see more clearly what the Ekklesia is called to be - and why Church cannot fulfill that calling.

Repentance: A Kingdom Perspective

The people to whom Jesus preached already had their own ideas about what the Messiah would do, and what His Kingdom would look like. Unfortunately those ideas were utterly wrong. So Jesus said they needed to repent: to change their heart, to change their mind, to change their behavior, and to get ready to experience something that went totally against their preconceived ideas and notions. To enter the Kingdom of God and to know the King around which this Kingdom is organized requires a radical change on many levels. The way you perceive things, the way you relate to things, the way you understand things – all of it has to be changed. At the very least it must be challenged.

The purpose of this book is to facilitate a change of direction in your life - a change of heart, a change of mind, a change of lifestyle - because that is what repentance really means. As we have already seen, repentance is closely connected to the Kingdom: "The time is fulfilled, and the Kingdom of God is at hand: repent, and believe the Gospel."³⁰ If you are a Christian then you may think this is unnecessary, since you have already

³⁰ Mk. 1:15.

"prayed the Sinner's Prayer." May I suggest, however, that repentance is not just for bad people who commit really bad sins. Repentance is a continual process of unlearning something old and embracing something new. It may be a new way of understanding God, or a new way of understanding yourself or the world around you.

Repentance is not only the means through which we *enter* the Kingdom of God, it is also the means through which we *progress* in the Kingdom of God. The path of progress, of spiritual maturity, hinges upon our willingness to let go of the old ways and embrace the new ways; to rise above the lower order of things and walk in a higher order – a heavenly way, a spiritual way, as opposed to the earthly, natural, carnal way that we are so used to walking.

Repentance is a continual process of agreeing with what God shows us about ourselves and then making the necessary adjustments. The Holy Spirit is intent upon making radical adjustments – to create in us a willingness to look at things differently; an eagerness to begin seeing things as God sees them, regardless of how uncomfortable that may be; to value the things that He values and let go of lesser things; to align ourselves with His Mind and Will for all things; to leave our ground altogether and come onto His ground - regardless of the consequences.

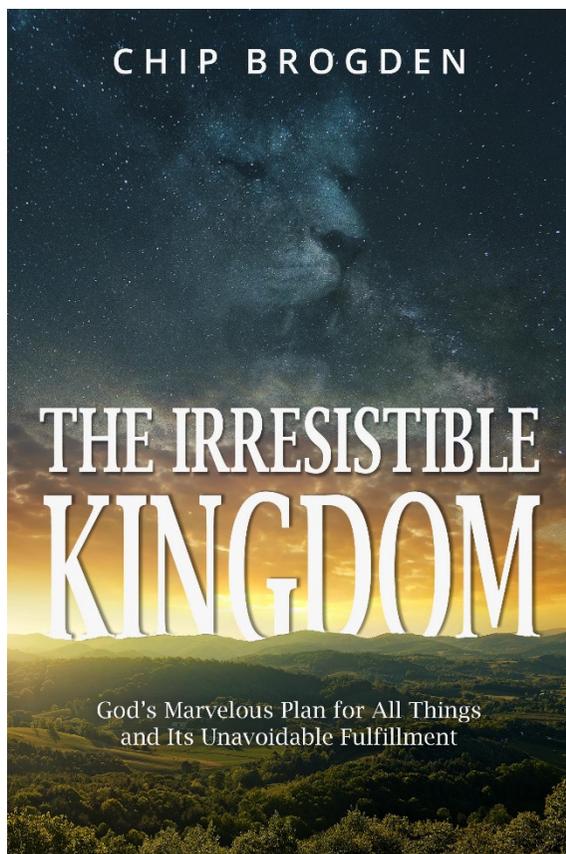
Jesus said that to see His Kingdom "you must be born-again."³¹ To enter His Kingdom, He requires us to "become as little children."³² That is another way of saying, "You have to start all over again. You cannot make any progress with Me so long as you cling to the old way of thinking, perceiving, understanding, and interacting. I cannot pour new wine into old wineskins because it would ruin both. You need a new wineskin – a new

³¹ Jn. 3:3,7.

³² Mt. 18:3.

heart, a new mind, a new understanding of things in order to receive what I wish to give you."

Are you ready to start all over again? If so, then let us go back to the very beginning, before anything was created, and take a peek at what God envisioned before time began.



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