

FULL GOSPEL—or half full?

Alan Hayward

It was a hot, still night, and the little church was packed. John Bookman felt beads of perspiration rolling down his forehead, and he was glad when the famous preacher began his appeal. He knew now that he would not have to endure the heat much longer.

"... and receive your Saviour's pardon here tonight!" concluded the penetrating voice. One by one five men and eight women walked steadily forward, and were led away into an ante-room. When the rest of the congregation were dismissed, and began to shuffle eagerly towards the fresh air. Bookman waited for the question that he knew was coming.

"Well, what do you think of our Gospel Service? Aren't you glad you came?" asked his friend Jim Missioner excitedly. They were out in the street now, and Bookman stopped walking.

"It was a stimulating experience", he said, "but one thing puzzled me." He raised his hand and tapped the notice board outside his friend's church. "It says 'Full Gospel preached here every Sunday Evening'. Would you say that your man preached a 'Full Gospel' here tonight?"

"Why, of course, and very effectively too! He spoke about our sin, and how Christ died to save us, and how his blood can cleanse us if only we will accept him. What's that, if it isn't the full gospel?"

Unbalanced Diet

"It certainly is a very important part of the gospel", replied Bookman, thoughtfully. "But somehow I think there is something lacking. Maybe what we heard tonight was a very ill-balanced gospel—rather like a dinner of all meat and no vegetables. Tell me, Jim, can you imagine a preacher who had never heard of the death of Christ, getting up and preaching the gospel?"

Missioner gaped at him. "Of course not. Are you serious? How could there possibly be any Christian gospel without the cross of Christ? Take away Calvary and there's nothing left—nothing at all."

"I'm not so sure, Jim. Let's see what the Book says." Bookman pulled a dog-eared Bible out of his breast pocket and thumbed over the pages. "Now what chapter is it?" he muttered. "Not seven, not eight,—ah, yes, here it is—Luke 9. Let's read through these verses together and then you tell me what you think.

Verses 1 to 6. 'Then he called his twelve disciples together, and gave them power . . . and he sent them to preach the kingdom of God . . . And they departed, and went through the towns, preaching the gospel.'

Verses 22, 44 and 45. 'The Son of man', Jesus said, 'must suffer many things, and be rejected of the elders and chief priests and scribes, and be slain . . . The Son of man shall be delivered into the hands of men. But they understood not this saying, *and it was hid from them*, that they perceived it not.' "

Jim Missioner stared at the verses and read them again. Surely they couldn't say . . . and yet they did say it, so plainly that there was no mistaking it. First the disciples were given power; then they went and preached the gospel; and all the time they never even knew that Jesus was going to be slain!

The Other Half

"All right, John. It certainly looks as if they must have preached a gospel with no Calvary in it. But what *did* they preach? That's what beats me."

"It's not really very difficult, Jim. They preached the other half of the gospel, the half that your friend left out. Tell me, do you and your Church believe that Jesus is coming back to the earth, to turn the whole world into a Kingdom of God, and reign over it for ever?"

"Yes, I'm inclined to think so myself", said Missioner, after a moment's hesitation. "But I can't speak for the Church as a whole. It's not a subject we hear much about. But in any case, what has it to do with this question of the Gospel?"

"It has everything to do with it, Jim. In fact, *it is the other half of the gospel*. This is what the apostles must have taught when they preached 'the gospel of the Kingdom of God' while they never knew that Jesus was going to die for our sins."

Jim Missioner looked doubtful. "How do you know that that's what they taught?" he challenged. "The Gospels don't say any such thing."

"There's a lot more evidence than you might think", replied Bookman, opening his Bible again. "First of all, the Bible is full of promises that God will one day send His Messiah to set up this Kingdom, and reign over all the world. Let's look at a few examples:

'As truly as I live, all the earth shall be filled with the glory of the Lord' (Numbers 14: 21).

'In the days of these kings shall the God of heaven set up a kingdom, which shall never be destroyed . . . but it shall break in pieces and consume all these kingdoms, and it shall stand for ever' (Daniel 2: 44).

'The Lord shall be king over all the earth' (Zechariah 14: 9).

'He shall have dominion also from sea to sea, and from the river unto the ends of the earth . . . Yea, all kings shall fall down before him: all nations shall serve him' (Psalm 72: 8-11).

'He shall judge among many people, and rebuke strong nations afar off; and they shall beat their swords into ploughshares and their spears into pruninghooks: nation shall not lift up a sword against nation, neither shall they learn war any more' (Micah 4: 3)."

Jesus and the Old Testament

"But those are all Old Testament passages", said Missioner. "Didn't Jesus come to offer men something better than what is in the Old Testament?"

"Yes—and no", replied Bookman. "He certainly said a lot of new things. But he constantly emphasised that his teaching was only an enlargement of the Old Testament teaching, and not a contradiction of it. Let me show you a few of his sayings about the Old Testament:

'Think not that I am come to destroy the law, or the prophets: I am not come to destroy, but to fulfil. For verily I say unto you, Till heaven and earth pass, one jot or one tittle shall in no wise pass from the law, till all be fulfilled' (Matthew 5: 17, 18).

'If they hear not Moses and the prophets, neither will they be persuaded, though one rose from the dead' (Luke 16: 31).

'Had ye believed Moses, ye would have believed me: for he wrote of me. But if ye believe not his writings, how shall ye believe my words?' (John 5: 46, 47)."

Jesus will be King

"So you see how Jesus has warned us: if we don't believe what is taught in the Old Testament we shall never be able to understand his own teaching!"

"But now let's look at another line of evidence. There are a number of places in the gospels where we are plainly told that Jesus is going to fulfil those Old Testament promises of a world-wide Kingdom. For example, the angel Gabriel made it very clear to Mary that *her Son was going to fulfil Isaiah's prophecy*.

Compare these two passages, phrase by phrase:

THE OLD TESTAMENT PROMISE:

'(1) Unto us a child is born, unto us a son is given: and the government shall be upon his shoulder: (2) and his name shall be called Wonderful, Counsellor, the mighty God, the everlasting Father, the Prince of Peace. Of the increase of his government and peace there shall be (3) no end, upon (4) the throne of David, and upon (5) his kingdom' (Isaiah 9: 6, 7).

THE NEW TESTAMENT APPLICATION:

'(1) Thou shalt conceive in thy womb, and bring forth a son, and shalt call his name Jesus. (2) He shall be great, and shall be called the Son of the Highest: and the Lord God shall give unto him (4) the throne of his father David: and he shall reign over the house of Jacob for ever; and of (5) his kingdom there shall be (3) no end' (Luke 1: 31-33)."

Jim Missioner looked puzzled. "But are you sure that these promises weren't fulfilled somehow when Jesus was on earth?"

"Quite sure, Jim. He never sat on the throne of David and ruled over the house of Jacob, did he? The house of Jacob shouted 'Crucify him! We have no king but Caesar!' And after Christ's ascension the apostle Peter preached that he would have to come back to the earth to fulfil all these Old Testament prophecies. Look, this is the passage:

'He (God) shall send Jesus Christ, which before was preached unto you: whom the heaven must receive until the times of restitution of all things, which God hath spoken by the mouth of all his holy prophets' (Acts 3: 20, 21). "

Eternal Life

"All right, John. It does look as if Jesus is coming back to reign on earth, just as lots of Christians believe. But what of it? That has nothing to do with the gospel. As I see it, the gospel is about eternal life and not about the Second Coming. "

Bookman paused a moment before he replied. "Jim, this is going to shock you. You are partly right. The gospel *is* about eternal life. But you cannot separate eternal life from the Second Coming. You see, *Jesus never promised eternal life in heaven to anybody, ever!* His gospel was a promise of bodily resurrection at the time of the Second Coming, followed by eternal life on earth in his Kingdom. "

"What a shocking thing to say, John! Why, I thought you knew your Bible. Jesus made lots of promises of heaven. He promised it to the dying thief on the cross. And he said. 'In my Father's house are many mansions'. And—and—well, I can't think of any more, but those two are enough, aren't they?"

The Dying Thief

Bookman opened his Bible at the 23rd chapter of Luke. "We must have a careful look at what he said to the thief. Do you know, serious Bible scholars of every denomination are convinced that Jesus could not possibly have promised 'You will be with me in heaven today'?"

"Why not?"

"Because if he had promised that, then he evidently broke his promise! That day Jesus was in

the grave, not in heaven. Even on the third day he still had not been to heaven, for then he said to Mary, 'I am not yet ascended to my Father' (John 20: 17). "

Jim Missioner frowned. "I see what you mean. There certainly is a problem there. Well, how do you explain what he said to the thief?"

"By taking note of three facts that are often ignored, Jim. Firstly, look at verse 42 and notice what the thief requested: 'Lord, remember me when thou *comest* into thy *kingdom*. He did not ask for a place in heaven, but for a place in Christ's kingdom when he comes again. "

"Secondly, the word 'Paradise' did not mean 'heaven' in those days. It was an ordinary word meaning 'a garden'. It is used in the Greek Old Testament to describe the garden of Eden.* When Adam and Eve were cast out of Eden, that was Paradise lost. In the coming Kingdom, when God once more makes the earth 'very good' (Genesis 1: 31), that will be Paradise regained. The thief asked for a place in the Kingdom; Jesus promised him a place in Paradise—which is another name for the same thing. "

"Thirdly, there was no punctuation in the original scriptures. The punctuation in our Bible was put in by the English translators, and being only human they sometimes made mistakes. Since, as we have seen, Jesus could not possibly have said, 'Verily I say unto thee—today thou shalt be with me in Paradise', he evidently must have said, 'Verily I say unto thee today—thou shalt be with me in Paradise!' In other words, 'I promise you now, that you will be in my Kingdom when I return from heaven.'"

[* Students possessing a Revised Version with the translators' marginal comments can verify for themselves that it is used in the same way in the New Testament, too, in Revelation 2: 7.]

Many Mansions

"Now let's go to John 14", Bookman went on. "People read verse 2, 'In my Father's house are many mansions... I go to prepare a place for you', and then they stop. If only they would read the next verse, they would see that this passage also is a promise of eternal life *when Christ comes again*, and not before. Look, it says 'And if I go and prepare a place for you, *I will come again*, and receive you unto myself.'"

Missioner shook his head. "But what about Christ's words 'My Father's house'? Surely you must admit that that refers to heaven?"

"Not at all, Jim", said Bookman softly. "Although God resides in heaven, it is never called 'The *house* of God' anywhere in the Bible. To the Jews 'The house of God' meant one thing only—a place where the Spirit of God dwelt *on earth*. For example, we find Stephen saying 'Solomon built him (God) an house' (Acts 7: 47). Similarly, on the only other occasion when Jesus spoke of 'My Father's house', in John 2: 16, he was clearly referring to God's dwelling place *on earth*, the temple in Jerusalem. When Jesus comes back and sets up God's Kingdom on earth, then, as it says in Revelation 21: 3, 'The tabernacle of God is with men, and *he will dwell with them*, ' Thus, in terms of a metaphor that the Jews clearly understood, a place in God's Kingdom is a place in God's future 'house' on earth. So you see, Jim, the promise of John 14 is again a promise of eternal life on earth when Jesus comes again. "

A Simple Gospel

His friend was not convinced. "But this is all too complicated to ring true, John. After all, the gospel is supposed to be simple."

"You're right!" replied Bookman enthusiastically. "The gospel *is* simple, delightfully simple. It is just a pity that we had to start by unravelling two passages that have been complicated by centuries of misinterpretation. But remember that there are no *simple* passages clearly promising heaven at death to the disciples—*none at all*. On the other hand, there are plenty of very simple verses promising a bodily resurrection when Christ returns, and eternal life in his Kingdom. Like to see a few examples?" And he turned up a series of passages in quick succession.

"Jesus saith unto her, thy brother shall rise again. Martha saith unto him, I know that he shall rise again in the resurrection *at the last day*. Jesus said unto her, I am the resurrection, and the life' (John 11: 23-25).

'When the Son of man shall *come* in his glory, and all the holy angels with him, then shall he sit upon the throne of his glory... Then shall the King say unto them on his right hand, 'Come, ye blessed of my Father, inherit the Kingdom'(Matthew 25: 31, 34).

'Blessed are the meek: for they shall inherit the earth' (Matthew 5: 5).

(Jesus said), 'Thou shalt be recompensed at the resurrection of the just. And when one of them that sat at meat with him heard these things, he said unto him. Blessed is he that shall eat bread in the Kingdom of God!' (Luke 14: 14, 15).

'The Lord Jesus Christ, who shall judge the quick and the dead *at his appearing and his Kingdom*... There is laid up for me (Paul) a crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous judge, shall give me *at that day*: and not to me only, but unto all them also that love his appearing' (2 Timothy 4: 1, 8).

'For since by man came death, by man came also the *resurrection of the dead*. For as in Adam all die, even so in Christ shall all be made alive. But every man in his own order: Christ the firstfruits; afterward they that are Christ's *at his coming*... Now this I say, brethren, that flesh and blood cannot inherit the kingdom of God ... (therefore) we shall all be changed, in a moment, in the twinkling of an eye, *at the last trump*: for the trumpet shall sound, and the dead shall be raised incorruptible, and we shall be changed' (1 Corinthians 15: 21-23, 50-52)."

Preachers and Hearers

"Hmm", said Jim Missioner thoughtfully. "That's an impressive array of Bible passages. Yet somehow I can't believe you are right. If you were, it would mean that the Churches today have drifted a long way from first-century Christianity — and how could that have happened?"

"There is a very simple explanation for that", replied Bookman, in a voice tinged with sadness. "Let's be honest; the attitude towards the Bible today is vastly different from the first century. I don't want to sound critical; your preacher tonight was obviously a very sincere man. But how often did he make use of the Old Testament? Not once, that I can recall. Yet that was the very way that Paul preached Christ. Look at Acts 17: 2, 'Paul, *as his manner was*... reasoned with them out of the (Old Testament) scriptures... that this Jesus, whom I preach unto you, is Christ. 'And now see in verse 11 how Paul's godly audience responded."

Jim Missioner looked at verse 11 for a whole minute. Then at last he spoke. "John, I think your ideas must be wrong. But—if you should happen to be right it means that I'm missing a lot. I must make sure about this. I'm going to read my Bible a lot more in future. And I shall not rest until I really know for certain what the Bible says about the Gospel. Goodnight, John, and thanks for what you have done to me."

Alan Hayward

Reader — Do you know what that verse was which so impressed Jim Missioner? It says, "These were more noble... in that they received the word with all readiness of mind *and searched the Scriptures daily*, whether those things were so."

God called them "noble" because of their attitude towards the Bible. Will He say the same of us?

AN INVITATION

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