

Chapter 1 of
"The Messiah People"
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Hot Iron Press, 1993

The Messianic Vision

The Spirit of the Lord

Well, I'm really thrilled to be here. Paul stood several times before people, as he said, 'with apprehensions' - and I do have apprehensions, but part of my apprehension is that I'm always scared of things that God wants to do because of what it calls from us. And I know that there's not one of us going to leave this time together the same person that we came. We're going to be challenged by God, unquestionably, in our togetherness, by His Spirit to a new obedience. And we're either going to say "Yes, God, by your grace I will move into that new obedience", or we're going to falter and we're going to move further back in our discipleship.

And I believe that we've got a tremendous and terrific and beautiful opportunity to discover, in our togetherness over these next few days, what it is to be God's people in a broken world and to take from this place new love, new understanding, new freedom, new openness to God's Spirit, new awareness of what it is to belong. And along with that sense of belonging, a new commitment to the little people, to the needy, to the oppressed, to the hurt, to those in need of healing.

You know, if God could hold in His hands a group this size of young men and women committed to Jesus Christ, He could do something very beautiful and very remarkable. And I believe, I know, He wants to do that remarkable thing. So I don't apologise that we're going to be looking quite seriously at the nature of the Gospel today. I believe even those of us who have a very profound experience of God's Spirit may yet be missing out on an understanding of what the gospel really is and what God is calling us to.

I've been invited to introduce, to open up, God's word on the area of what it means to be the Messiah People. Tonight we're going to look at the vision - the Messianic Vision - that is held before us in God's word.

And I'm going to read (if you're accustomed to always reading, perhaps you might want to listen; if you're someone who always listens, it might be good to turn up the book) Luke, chapter four. I'm reading verses, 1 and 2, 14-19, then 43, so if I'm jumping you're going to have to jump with me!

'And Jesus, full of the Holy Spirit, returned from the Jordan and was led by the Spirit for forty days in the wilderness, tempted by the devil... And Jesus returned, in the power of the Spirit into Galilee. And a report concerning

Him went out through all the surrounding country and He taught in their synagogues, being glorified by all.

'And He came to Nazareth, where He had been brought up and He went to the synagogue as His custom was on the Sabbath day. And He stood up to read and there was given to Him the scroll of the prophet Isaiah. He opened the book and found the place where it was written: "The Spirit of the Lord is upon me because He has anointed me to preach good news to the poor, He has sent me to proclaim deliverance to the captives and recovering of sight to the blind, to set at liberty those who are oppressed, to proclaim the acceptable year of the Lord."'

And later in verse 43: Jesus said to the people, 'I must proclaim the good news of the kingdom of God to other cities also, for I was sent for this purpose.'

The Good News of Jesus

I wonder if you notice (apart from the place of the Holy Spirit in all of that story, to which we must return), what the good news of the gospel was for Jesus. Many of us here, rejoicing in the fact that God, in His love, has laid His hand upon us and has given us the experience of new life through Jesus Christ, believe that the good news is about personal conversion, that the good news is about rebirth. But I want to suggest to you that the good news we find Jesus proclaiming is good news of the kingdom of God. good news of God's reign; that Jesus is, in fact, talking about and announcing and bringing, in Himself, a new order; that the good news is of the new order of existence that Jesus has come to bring, to demonstrate, to make possible. And the gateway into the new kingdom is by the new birth.

But the good news is of what lies beyond the new birth. The good news is good news of the reign of God. The good news of God's kingdom - a whole new order, a whole new humanity, a whole new creation. And so long as we stop at proclaiming good news which takes people just across the threshold, we are stopping short of a proclamation of the good news that Jesus was proclaiming and embodying. Jesus came that there might be a new humanity. And the disciple group around Him were the beginnings of God's new humanity, giving expression in their relationships, in their togetherness, in their new peoplehood, to the kingdom or reign of God.

We've not got a great deal of time, but I would like to give us a little of the background as we have it in the Old Testament because this concept of God's reign, or God's kingdom to be experienced now, goes right back into the Old Testament. The content of God's reign is caught up in several themes. And some of you who know me quite well know that one of these has revolutionised my own understanding of the gospel and shown me a great deal of beauty in my understanding of God's truth: the Hebrew word *shalom*.

The reign of shalom

Again and again in the Hebrew scriptures the content of the kingdom of God, the content of

God's reign is described as shalom. Now we have rendered this - I don't know what it is in Swedish, perhaps you get closer to it there, but we have rendered it in English by the word peace. Unfortunately, the word peace simply gets nowhere near the richness of the Hebrew word shalom. It is a word which comes from a verb meaning to make complete, to bring into completeness, to bring into wholeness and it refers to the totality of well-being when a thing is whole as it was intended to be. For the individual person, that person was experiencing God's shalom (let's notice that it's God's shalom - shalom is always a gift of God and not something which people create - shalom is God's gift) when his or her person is in wholeness.

Wholeness of body

Yes, health is part of wholeness, health is part of shalom. Sickness was no part of God's plan or intention for humanity; health and wholeness were. Wholeness, health of body, health of mind, health of heart and a whole health relationship between human beings and God. But shalom is more than personal wholeness, because we can't receive that in isolation. Shalom exists between persons where they have that relationship of love and unity which moves them both towards wholeness: shalom be between you and me. May we have the kind of relationship, the kind of trust, the kind of love, the kind of understanding, the kind of openness and honesty with each other, that our relationship is moving us both towards God's wholeness. God has placed us as human beings in such a way that we develop in our relationships with others - we each become unique persons because of our relationships to those around us and God's intention was that this should produce shalom.

Harmony, unity, trust, honesty, - more than that, shalom is a word used again and again in the Bible of God's intention for a neighbourhood, for a community, for a society and in that understanding shalom is that wholeness within a society where each person matters, each person is treasured, each person belongs and counts and is valued.

Shalom and justice

So. there is no shalom when one part of a society has its heel heavily down on the neck of another part. There is no shalom in a society of injustice. There is no shalom in a society where racism prevails. There is no shalom in a society of elitism and privilege and of the kind of unequal distribution of wealth that means that some people are living in dire poverty. while others live it up on beds of ivory.

And this is a message that we are not proclaiming today. The prophets did, Jesus did, the apostles did, but we have fallen silent because we as God's people today are implicated in injustice. We are up to the neck and over involved in injustice. We sit here, probably all of us, as representatives of 'man's inhumanity to man' and we don't say boo to it. We are the beneficiaries of injustice and we tolerate that situation, and as God's people we have not been active in the pursuit of justice.

The parts of our Bible which will probably have no underlining whatsoever are God's

clear commands to pursue justice: 'That's not our message. we're evangelicals. There are other people who are interested in that.' It is God's message. God's message is for shalom and justice. 'And shalom and God's purposes will kiss each other'; 'Justice will roll down like a river.' So we cannot ignore God's call to shalom that involves justice.

There are prophets who say 'shalom, shalom' when there is no shalom. There are false prophets and the false prophets of the Bible identified stage after stage with the status quo. They said the things that pleased the people in authority. The prophets of God spoke God's truth. When God's heart was hurting, they expressed that hurt and when God was angry, they expressed God's anger. And we dare not sing these happy songs if we are not at the same time to share the hurt of the world and the hurt in God's heart.

I put it to you that a discipleship which is a discipleship in the Spirit of God is one which is concerned with the things which concern God's heart. We'll find ourselves returning to this one if we're going to stay with God's word.

We could go further. Shalom is taken right out into the whole created order. Job says that the very beasts of the field shall be in shalom and Isaiah gives us a vision - I wonder if it's just a dream, or is it really a vision that will come about? I dare to hope so. I wonder if I'm a sentimentalist. I have wondered again and again about animals, again and again about the little dog to whom we told so many of our troubles; who was God's means again and again of bringing healing when we were disturbed; who at points of loneliness and friendlessness was the one thing that God gave us to bundle around in life.

I wonder about the solitary, lonely people whose lives God has caught up with another part of His creation. Certainly Isaiah gives us a vision that the lion and the lamb shall lie down together and a little child shall lead them. Perhaps it's just a dream pointing us to the reality that will come, but one dares to hope that God does mean to, through Jesus, to bring us a whole creation restored in Him - and will do do.

The Prince of Shalom

Let's move quickly to Jesus, the centrepiece of the whole of history, of God's purposes for His world. In Isaiah again we have these words, looking forward to the one who is to come: 'Unto us a child is born, unto us a son is given, his name shall be the Prince of Shalom.' The one who is to come shall be the Prince of Shalom, and Isaiah adds 'and of his government and of his shalom there will be no end.' So, over Bethlehem, whatever else we make of the song of the angels: 'Glory to God in the highest, on earth shalom.'

So as we look through the ministry of Jesus we find again and again as He approaches people: 'Your trust has made you whole. Go into shalom.' As Jesus reached out and brought healing to the deaf man, healing to the blind, fitness to the person whose limbs had been disjunct, forgiveness to the person whose life had been screwed up by guilt, He said 'Go into shalom.' Each healing was an indication that the King was present, that the reign of shalom, the reign of wholeness had come among human beings. And each healing was a

sign of the total wholeness, the full shalom that is God's will for His world. In John's gospel, the very word that we translate as miracles - *semeion* - is the word for a sign. Each miracle was a sign of the presence of the Messiah, the presence of the King, the presence of God's reign, the presence of the wholeness, the healing, the fulness that was God's purposes for us. You'll find one reference there - Mark 5:34 - if you want to chase it along.

The place of shalom

Jesus' ministry moved towards one goal, towards the cross. Isaiah had said of the Messiah, 'the chastisement of our shalom was upon him.' (Isaiah 53:5) The chastisement that is the means of bringing us to God's wholeness was upon Him. As He died that death upon the cross, Jesus was doing something on the part of the broken world that we could not do for ourselves. As the one shalom man, the one whose whole body, heart, mind was as God intended it to be, the one who was wholly right with God, wholly right with those around Him, wholly right with the created world, the Messiah Himself, offered Himself for our world upon the cross. By His stripes we are healed. The Prince of Shalom gained shalom for us upon the cross.

Paul puts it this way in Colossians I :20, 'He has made shalom through the blood of His cross.' 'But the God of shalom raised Jesus from death,' Hebrews 13:20. And Jesus at that last supper fulfilled the promise of the Old Testament to create a new covenant of shalom, a covenant in His blood, and we become the people of shalom. We'll look at this another evening, but just note in passing - when Paul speaks in Ephesians of Jews and non-Jews being divided by a wall of alienation he says that Jesus, by His death, has smashed down the dividing wall and from these two is making one new humanity, thereby creating shalom. And those of us who are caught up by Jesus Christ in this new peoplehood are empowered by God's Spirit, enabled by God, to be the new people of shalom, demonstrating the very reign of God in the midst of a broken world.

And it's that kind of challenge that God is placing upon us. We are called upon, in the midst of an old order, to live as the people of the new order, the people of the shalom.

So, as we gather to the Lord's Supper we have the kiss of shalom. It's been restored in some of our liturgies as a little handshake, but in the early church it was a glorious affirmation of brotherhood, sisterhood: people found their way to each other and enthusiastically embraced each other because of the new social reality that God had brought into being through Jesus Christ.

As black man and white man hugged one another, something new had come into the world, because of Jesus. As the Roman matron who'd become a Christian, the Jewish streetgirl who'd been a prostitute, who'd found new life and love in Jesus, hugged one another, something new had happened. And we dare not come to the Lord's table unless we understand the nature of the new family, the new humanity of which the kiss of shalom is a symbol and a sign and a sacrament.

The makers of peace

What does it mean that Jesus says, 'Blessed are the makers of shalom'? Blessed are the peacemakers - yes? Blessed are the makers of shalom, the people whose lives under God, open to His Spirit, are committed to the pursuit of wholeness in all its manifestations. Does it do anything for us to look to the end of God's vision and to recognise that when God tells us that to the earth comes down from God the new Jerusalem, (Jerusalem is *Jeru* and *shalom*: the city of shalom) and that God's purpose is to bring into this Babylon His wholeness, His completeness, His perfection?

So God's vision is the bringing of wholeness and completeness to the whole of the creation that He loves. God so loved the cosmos - not just us, though we're important to God - but it's the totality of the cosmos which God so loved and for which He sent His Son. We miss a primary dimension of the gospel if we ignore the fact that the whole of creation is groaning in travail, but is going to come to new creation, because of Jesus.

We also need to remember that the Spirit was there at the first creation, the Spirit was responsible for the incarnation, the Spirit responsible for the resurrection, the Spirit responsible for the new creation. It's God's Spirit who's responsible for the hush in some of our hearts just now, as we realise we're facing something of God.

Entering the kingdom

Time is going. Let me simply draw one little picture that the Bible gives us of wholeness and let's not lose sight of the fact that shalom is the content of God's reign and that Jesus came

proclaiming the good news of God's reign. In fact, you'll find it neatly put for you in Acts 10:36, 'God is making known the good news, shalom through Jesus, He is Lord of all.' Shalom through Jesus, He is Lord of all.

But there are some words that are related to this that might awaken us perhaps. Jesus said, 'How hardly shall a rich man enter the kingdom of God.' These are dreadful words from Jesus - dreadful to those of us who live in the West, knowing what we're doing to the people of the Third World; dreadful to those of us in the West knowing the situation of so many others who are not as we are.

When did you last hear that preached? Jesus says, 'Woe to you who are rich now,' do you hear those words upon His Body today? Does the Body of Jesus open its lips to say words like those to the world? In our evangelistic campaigns, the people who come down to the front, who long to respond to Jesus Christ, do we stop them and say, 'Woe to you who are rich now'? Are we faced with the demands of the new order in the presence of the old? Or do we call people to some kind of easy gospel that is no gospel, that says, 'Live the life of the old order and Jesus will give you peace while you do it? Is that our message?

The disciples who responded to the words of Jesus when He said, 'How hardly shall a

rich man enter the kingdom of God', with 'who then shall be saved?' You see, to enter into the kingdom of God is to be saved and salvation as a concept is linked up with shalom and linked up with the kingdom of God. It's a word of emancipation, a word of liberation, a word of freedom.

That which is saved is brought from a situation of un-freedom into a situation of freedom, from a situation of unwholeness into one of wholeness. And it covers all kinds of situations: the disciples in the storm at sea turned round and cried, 'Lord, save us!' Yes, they were in a situation from which they wanted deliverance into security. To people who were lacking in health, Jesus says, 'Your trust has saved you.' Yes, salvation has to do with the healing of broken bodies and yes, of course, it has to do with the restoration of the friendship and love between God and ourselves for which He has been longing, for which He has done all that needs be done to call us to trust.

So salvation is a concept of liberation into wholeness. The Old Testament word - some of you may know this already, if you don't, it's a fun thought - the Old Testament word means to take out of confinement and constriction into something that's open. The Old Testament verb 'to save' was to take out of a situation where people were being squeezed!

And having been released we can rejoice. The word *chairein*, which is the verb which we translate rejoice, comes from *char*. And *char* is the root that means well-being - very close to wholeness, and *charis* is that attitude within one person which moves out to pursue the well-being of another. The *charis* of God is God's longing in His heart that you experience wholeness, God's longing that you have total well-being. And *chara* - joy - is your experience of God's well-being.

Joy - how hard it is to find a word that says what joy means - is our experience of the well-being, the wholeness that God has brought us. And charisma, if I dare say it in this gathering, is that which arises from God's *charis*, that which is the outcome, that which is the result given to us by the *charis* of God.

Messiahed in the Spirit

I'm almost going to stop. I want to draw attention once again to what we read right at the beginning. Jesus when He stood up in the synagogue said, 'The Spirit of the Lord is upon me

because He has anointed me.' I'm going to suggest that some of you might find this a fruitful thought - I'm going to make up an English verb from the noun messiah, the verb to be messiahed. It doesn't exist as far as I know, but you see, the Hebrew word messiah is the Greek word *christos* or Christ, and that, in English is the word anointed.

And I find it very sad that so many people can read the New Testament and, because of our translations, not realise how often the apostles are talking about the Messiah. The word Christ is not a surname for Jesus. It's not His second name, it's a title - Jesus Messiah. And all the meaning of the whole of the Hebrew vision is caught up in that. Paul says that, 'I

have decided to know nothing among you except Jesus Messiah and Him crucified.' Also notice that Jesus was messiahed in the Spirit. It's by the Spirit of God that messiahship takes place.

And as an almost final thought, because this takes us into tomorrow evening, to be in Christ is to be in the Messiah. To be *christianoï*, which is what they were first called at Antioch, is to be messiah people. And to be anointed in the Spirit is to be messiahed in the Spirit. And if by trust you have placed yourself by God's grace within the kingdom of God, you are a messiah person, and a member of the Messiah people and you are caught up by the Spirit of God with the Messiah to be with Him all that God called Him to be, in bringing of the world to God's shalom.

The very last thought. It was a message of the reign of God that Jesus brought to the people, and with it the challenge to repentance. And repentance is not some kind of wishy-washy regret. Repentance is not sitting down for half an hour in tears. Repentance is the very thing which changes the total orientation of our lives, our total outlook: *metanoia* means a change of attitude, a change of orientation, a change of understanding and the totality is changed. Have we experienced repentance? Jesus called people to repentance and then to enter into the kingdom.

It is my prayer that any of us who are outside of the kingdom during these few days will, in the love they experience within this community, move into the kingdom. It is my prayer that those of us who have been in the kingdom will understand what we're in and will look to the Spirit of God to empower us to be what we are in Christ.

Let's pray.