

## THE UNFINISHED BUSINESS OF THE FOURTH EPOCHAL REVELATION

### – Part 2 –

*By contributing author Julian McGarry*

#### 4. The First Century Failure of the Mission of the Fourth Epochal Revelation

Michael came to Urantia to carry out his Father's business, to declare the good news or gospel of the kingdom of heaven, a spiritual kingdom, the likes of which the world had never beheld. He selected twelve men to be his apostles and ambassadors, and he trained them to teach a specific message, variously denoted by terms such as the kingdom of heaven, the kingdom of God, the gospel of Jesus, the gospel of the kingdom, or the religion of Jesus. His instructions to the twelve were straightforward:

*“Simply go forth proclaiming: This is the kingdom of heaven--God is your Father and you are his sons, and this good news, if you wholeheartedly believe it, is your eternal salvation.”*  
[Paper 141:6.4; page 1592.6]

*In answer to Thomas's question, “Who is this God of the kingdom?” Jesus replied: “God is your Father, and religion — my gospel — is nothing more nor less than the believing recognition of the truth that you are his son. And I am here among you in the flesh to make clear both of these ideas in my life and teachings.”*  
[Paper 141:4.2; page 1590.5]

The substance of Jesus's message was:

1. *The kingdom of heaven is at hand.*
2. *By faith in the fatherhood of God you may enter the kingdom of heaven, thus becoming the sons of God.*
3. *Love is the rule of living within the kingdom — supreme devotion to God while loving your neighbor as yourself.*
4. *Obedience to the will of the Father, yielding the fruits of the spirit in one's personal life, is the law of the kingdom.*

[Paper 142:1.2-5; page 1596.4-7]

He emphasized many times the importance of not attempting to teach advanced spiritual concepts to those who had only been born of the flesh:

*He said in part: "When you enter the kingdom, you are reborn. You cannot teach the deep things of the spirit to those who have been born only of the flesh; first see that men are born of the spirit before you seek to instruct them in the advanced ways of the spirit."*

**[Paper 141:6.4; page 1592.6]**

Jesus wasn't naïve; he was a realist! He was aware of the proclivity of humans to venerate the messenger rather than the message. This often took the form of imaginative myths and legends based on some spectacular incident that occurred in the life of such a divine messenger.

*Most great religious epochs have been inaugurated by the life and teachings of some outstanding personality; leadership has originated a majority of the worth-while moral movements of history. And men have always tended to venerate the leader, even at the expense of his teachings; to revere his personality, even though losing sight of the truths which he proclaimed. And this is not without reason; there is an instinctive longing in the heart of evolutionary man for help from above and beyond. This craving is designed to anticipate the appearance on earth of the Planetary Prince and the later Material Sons. On Urantia man has been deprived of these superhuman leaders and rulers, and therefore does he constantly seek to make good this loss by enshrouding his human leaders with legends pertaining to supernatural origins and miraculous careers. [Paper 92:5.5; page 1008.7]*

*Jesus endeavored to make clear to his apostles the difference between his teachings and his life among them and the teachings which might subsequently spring up about him. Said Jesus: "My kingdom and the gospel related thereto shall be the burden of your message. Be not sidetracked into preaching about me and about my teachings. Proclaim the gospel of the kingdom and portray my revelation of the Father in heaven but do not be misled into the bypaths of creating legends and building up a cult having to do with beliefs and teachings about my beliefs and teachings." But again, they did not understand why he thus spoke, and no man dared to ask why he so taught them.*

**[Paper 138:6.3; page 1543.1]**

*One purpose which Jesus had in mind, when he sought to segregate certain features of his earthly experience, was to prevent the building up of such a versatile and spectacular career as would cause subsequent generations to venerate the teacher in place of obeying the truth which he had lived and taught. Jesus did not want to build up such a human record of achievement as would attract attention from his teaching. Very early he recognized that his followers would be tempted to formulate a religion about him which*

*might become a competitor of the gospel of the kingdom that he intended to proclaim to the world. Accordingly, he consistently sought to suppress everything during his eventful career which he thought might be made to serve this natural human tendency to exalt the teacher in place of proclaiming his teachings.*

*[Paper 128:4.6, page 1413.2]*

Jesus took every opportunity to exhort his apostolic representatives to proclaim the life-saving message of the gospel of the kingdom, right up until his arrest and execution and finally when bidding them farewell as he ascended into the heavens.

*Remember that you are commissioned to preach this gospel of the kingdom — the supreme desire to do the Father's will coupled with the supreme joy of the faith realization of sonship with God — and you must not allow anything to divert your devotion to this one duty. Let all mankind benefit from the overflow of your loving spiritual ministry, enlightening intellectual communion, and uplifting social service; but none of these humanitarian labors, nor all of them, should be permitted to take the place of proclaiming the gospel. These mighty ministrations are the social by-products of the still more mighty and sublime ministrations and transformations wrought in the heart of the kingdom believer by the living Spirit of Truth and by the personal realization that the faith of a spirit-born man confers the assurance of living fellowship with the eternal God.*

*[Paper 178:1.11; page 1931.2]*

*“Peace be upon you. That which my Father sent me into the world to establish belongs not to a race, a nation, nor to a special group of teachers or preachers. This gospel of the kingdom belongs to both Jew and gentile, to rich and poor, to free and bond, to male and female, even to the little children. And you are all to proclaim this gospel of love and truth by the lives which you live in the flesh. You shall love one another with a new and startling affection, even as I have loved you. You will serve mankind with a new and amazing devotion, even as I have served you. And when men see you so love them, and when they behold how fervently you serve them, they will perceive that you have become faith-fellows of the kingdom of heaven, and they will follow after the Spirit of Truth which they see in your lives, to the finding of eternal salvation.*

*[Paper 191:6.2; page 2044.3. Emphasis added]*

*“As the Father sent me into this world, even so now send I you. You are all called to carry the good news to those who sit in darkness. This gospel of the kingdom belongs to all who believe it; it shall not be committed to the custody of mere priests. Soon will the Spirit of Truth come upon you, and he shall lead you into all truth. Go you,*

*therefore, into all the world preaching this gospel, and lo, I am with you always, even to the end of the ages.”*

*[Paper 191:6.3; page 2044.4]*

*Jesus now prepared to say his last farewell to the apostles before he took leave of Urantia. As he stood there before them, without being directed they knelt about him in a circle, and the Master said:*

*“I bade you tarry in Jerusalem until you were endowed with power from on high. I am now about to take leave of you; I am about to ascend to my Father, and soon, very soon, will we send into this world of my sojourn the Spirit of Truth; and when he has come, you shall begin the new proclamation of the gospel of the kingdom, first in Jerusalem and then to the uttermost parts of the world. Love men with the love wherewith I have loved you and serve your fellow mortals even as I have served you. By the spirit fruits of your lives impel souls to believe the truth that man is a son of God, and that all men are brethren. Remember all I have taught you and the life I have lived among you. My love overshadows you, my spirit will dwell with you, and my peace shall abide upon you. Farewell.”*

*[Paper 193:5.1,2; page 2057.3,4]*

Notwithstanding Jesus’s persistent attempts to maintain the focus and purity of the gospel message, the apostles, and later disciples succumbed to the natural tendency of mortals to exalt the teacher and to lose sight of and distort his message of salvation. This process began while the apostles were hiding in the upper chamber in Jerusalem, subsequent to Jesus’s death and resurrection.

*The apostles had purposely entered Jerusalem after nightfall that they might not be seen by the Jewish authorities. Neither did they publicly appear in connection with the funeral of Elijah Mark. All the next day they remained in quiet seclusion in this eventful upper chamber.*

*On Thursday night the apostles had a wonderful meeting in this upper chamber, and all pledged themselves to go forth in the public preaching of the new gospel of the risen Lord except Thomas, Simon Zelotes, and the Alpheus twins. **Already had begun the first steps of changing the gospel of the kingdom** — sonship with God and brotherhood with man — into the proclamation of the resurrection of Jesus. Nathaniel opposed this shift in the burden of their public message, but he could not withstand Peter’s eloquence, neither could he overcome the enthusiasm of the disciples, especially the women believers.*

*And so, under the vigorous leadership of Peter and ere the Master ascended to the Father, his well-meaning representatives began that subtle process of gradually and certainly **changing the religion of Jesus into a new and modified form of religion about Jesus.***

*[Paper 192:4.6-8; page 2051.3-5. Emphasis added.]*

Following the outpouring of the Spirit of Truth at Pentecost, the apostles were imbued with renewed joy, confidence, and enthusiasm for the kingdom. However, their message had changed!

*These men had been trained and instructed that the gospel which they should preach was the fatherhood of God and the sonship of man, but at just this moment of spiritual ecstasy and personal triumph, the best tidings, the greatest news, these men could think of was the fact of the risen Master. And so they went forth, endowed with power from on high, preaching glad tidings to the people — even salvation through Jesus — but they unintentionally stumbled into the error of substituting some of the facts associated with the gospel for the gospel message itself. Peter unwittingly led off in this mistake, and others followed after him on down to Paul, who created a new religion out of the new version of the good news.*

*The gospel of the kingdom is: the fact of the fatherhood of God, coupled with the resultant truth of the sonship-brotherhood of men. Christianity, as it developed from that day, is: the fact of God as the Father of the Lord Jesus Christ, in association with the experience of believer-fellowship with the risen and glorified Christ.*

*It is not strange that these spirit-infused men should have seized upon this opportunity to express their feelings of triumph over the forces which had sought to destroy their Master and end the influence of his teachings. At such a time as this it was easier to remember their personal association with Jesus and to be thrilled with the assurance that the Master still lived, that their friendship had not ended, and that the spirit had indeed come upon them even as he had promised.*

*These believers felt themselves suddenly translated into another world, a new existence of joy, power, and glory. The Master had told them the kingdom would come with power, and some of them thought they were beginning to discern what he meant.*

*And when all of this is taken into consideration, it is not difficult to understand how these men came to preach a new gospel about Jesus in the place of their former message of the fatherhood of God and the brotherhood of men. [Paper 194:0.3-7; page 2059.3-7]*

Had the apostles been obedient to Jesus and preserved the original content of the good news of the spiritual kingdom, as Jesus himself had taught them, what would have been the historical repercussions? What effect on the world did changing the message have at that time? The answer to these questions is nothing short of astounding! When ordaining the twelve apostles, Jesus foretold that the whole earth would be filled with his Father's praise and that all men would come to a saving knowledge of his Father, as a consequence of the words and actions of his disciples.

*“Whosoever would become great in my Father’s kingdom shall become a minister to all; and whosoever would be first among you, let him become the server of his brethren. But when you are once truly received as citizens in the heavenly kingdom, you are no longer servants but sons, sons of the living God. **And so shall this kingdom progress in the world until it shall break down every barrier and bring all men to know my Father and believe in the saving truth which I have come to declare.** Even now is the kingdom at hand, and some of you will not die until you have seen the reign of God come in great power.*

*“And this which your eyes now behold, this small beginning of twelve commonplace men, shall multiply and grow until eventually the whole earth shall be filled with the praise of my Father. And it will not be so much by the words you speak as by the lives you live that men will know you have been with me and have learned of the realities of the kingdom. And while I would lay no grievous burdens upon your minds, I am about to put upon your souls the solemn responsibility of representing me in the world when I shall presently leave you as I now represent my Father in this life which I am living in the flesh.” And when he had finished speaking, he stood up.*

**[Paper 140:1.6,7; page 1569.3,4. Emphasis added.]**

Jesus's early followers created a new religion about their Master which was designed to appeal to certain audiences, but which inadvertently stumbled many others.

*Jesus understood the minds of men. He knew what was in the heart of man, **and had his teachings been left as he presented them, the only commentary being the inspired interpretation afforded by his earth life, all nations and all religions of the world would speedily have embraced the gospel of the kingdom.** The well-meant efforts of Jesus' early followers to restate his teachings so as to make them the more acceptable to certain nations, races, and religions, only resulted in making such teachings the less acceptable to all other nations, races, and religions.*

**[Paper 149:2.1, page 1670.2. Emphasis added.]**

Even nations dominated by Islam today would have been receptive to Jesus's original teachings in the first century had the Christian missionaries adhered to them.

*Here and there throughout Arabia were families and clans that held on to the hazy idea of the one God. Such groups treasured the traditions of Melchizedek, Abraham, Moses, and Zoroaster. There were numerous centers that might have responded to the **Jesusonian gospel**, but the Christian missionaries of the desert lands were an austere and unyielding group in contrast with the compromisers and innovators who functioned as missionaries in the Mediterranean countries. **Had the followers of Jesus taken more seriously his injunction to “go into all the world and preach the gospel,” and had they been more gracious in that preaching, less stringent in collateral social requirements of their own devising, then many lands would gladly have received the simple gospel of the carpenter’s son, Arabia among them.***  
[Paper 95:7.3; page 1051.1. Emphasis added.]

Understandably, but tragically, the early Christians developed a cult based on the personality of Jesus, which only served to detract from his glorious teachings, that otherwise would have had universal appeal.

*...The second great blunder of the Master’s early followers, and one which all subsequent generations have persisted in perpetuating, was to organize the Christian teaching so completely about the person of Jesus. This overemphasis of the personality of Jesus in the theology of Christianity has worked to obscure his teachings, and all of this has made it increasingly difficult for Jews, Mohammedans, Hindus, and other Eastern religionists to accept the teachings of Jesus. We would not belittle the place of the person of Jesus in a religion which might bear his name, but we would not permit such consideration to eclipse his inspired life or to supplant his saving message: the fatherhood of God and the brotherhood of man.*  
[Paper 149:2.4, page 1670.5]

Indeed, rather than bringing all peoples and nations into a state of peace and unity, the message promoted by these early Christians ultimately created catastrophic divisions that persist to the present day.

***Go to: Part 3***

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