

1.2.2 Eschatological Gospel

The Eschatological Gospel is based on the combination of two theological concepts: eschatology and gospel. The Eschatological Gospel is born out by both the eschatological emphasis of Jesus in His chosen name for Himself, “Son of Man” (taken from the eschatological vision of Dan 7:13-14), and His own words in the Kingdom Parables, the Lord’s Prayer, the Words of Institution at the Last Supper, the Great Commission, and the Revelation or Apocalypse given to John on the Isle of Patmos. There are some theologians who say that studying the Gospel of Salvation (soteriology) and studying end-time doctrine (eschatology) are two separate parts of theology and should not be combined in any way lest the powerful message of the Gospel become diluted (Michael Martin 1995:1). Then, there are those who say that eschatology was already “fully realized” in Jesus’ First Advent, or in the Gospel, and that the establishment of the kingdom of heaven/God occurred at that time. This school of thought is labeled Realized Eschatology (Dodd 1938:159; 1944:85; 1961:viii, 29-35, 159, 164). However, the preponderance of the evidence leads one to conclude that both theological concepts are indeed interrelated and may be combined to form one unique concept of the Eschatological Gospel of Both Comings of the Lord Jesus Christ.

This may be seen by the following Old Testament prophecies concerning *both* advents/comings of the Messiah being connected. In Malachi 3:1 and 4:5, *My messenger* was John the Baptist preparing the way in 3:1 (and Isaiah 40:3) for the First Advent; whereas *Elijah the prophet* (in 4:5) will be one of the two witnesses in Rev 11:3-12 and Zech 4:3, 11, 14, to prepare the way for the Second Advent. In Isaiah 9:1-7, verses 1-6 speak of the *birth* of Jesus at the First Advent; whereas verse 7 speaks of an eternal kingdom of David, which Messiah governs in *peace, justice and righteousness* beginning at the Second Advent and through the

Millennium [emphasis added]. In Joel 2:28 – 3:21, the pouring out of the Holy Spirit (mentioned in 2:28-29) was fulfilled during the beginning of the Church Age/Jesus' First Advent (Acts 2:17); whereas the rest of the verses speak of the signs surrounding the Second Advent. In Daniel 2:31-45 and 9:20-27, 2:31-45 speak of the Gentile powers reigning on the earth from Daniel's time until the Second Coming and the establishment of the kingdom of God. Specifically, Daniel 9:20-26a speak of the First Advent of the Messiah and His death (some 483 years after the decree to restore and rebuild Jerusalem); whereas verses 26b-27 speak of the destruction of the Second Temple in AD 70 and future events involving the rebuilt Temple at the time of the antichrist (Biederwolf 1985:309, 312-3; 55-7; 251-6; 204-5, 217-225). Add to that, Jesus' eschatological name for Himself ("Son of Man," taken from Dan 7:13 and a reference to His Second Coming in glory to judge the earth) and His teaching on the kingdom of heaven/God from an "already come (in the person of Jesus the Messiah and His ministry), but not fully yet (until the Second Coming and the establishment of the Kingdom of God on earth)" eschatological perspective (Chilton 1984:26; Geisler 2005:497-8; Ladd 1974:59, 63-9; Smalley 1964:54), and there remains little doubt that the theological concept of the Eschatological Gospel is one worth defining and studying.

Eschatology, in general terms, derives from the Greek word *eschatos*, meaning "the extreme, most remote spoken of place and time, the last," the study of last things, End Times, or final events surrounding the *Parousia*, Second Coming or Advent of the Lord Jesus Christ (Zodhiates 1992:661-2). *The Dictionary of Fundamental Theology* defines Christian eschatology as the following:

Two inseparable aspects must be kept in mind in any discussion of eschatology from the Christian viewpoint. First, the full revelation of God has already occurred in Jesus. . . . In the coming of Christ, the "Last" has burst forth upon the world: indeed, it is he who is the "Last" . . . one must not neglect the concrete content of Christian hope, which is not only

the supreme “Last,” but also the “last things”: what we human beings hope for, whether at the close of history (collective or final eschatology), or at the term of our individual mortal lives (personal or “intermediate” eschatology). . . . This second aspect . . . Christian hope can have no other ultimate object than God, who is manifested to us in Christ. . . . Jesus as the eschatological event opens us to the meaning of the ultimacies of the world and the human being. What has occurred in Jesus, although as yet in a veiled manner—that which, since his resurrection, is reality in him who is the head—awaits full manifestation in his entire body. . . . *Christian eschatology is an aspect of the salvation proclamation: it is “gospel” in the purest sense of the word. This is how it was understood by the first Christians, whose burning desire was for the full manifestation of Jesus in glory. . . . The Lord’s coming or Parousia, therefore, is the consequence of his resurrection: that future coming is the full realization of the salvation whose foundation is in the victory Jesus has already won. Paul has expressed the theological content of this event in 1 Cor 15:23-28 [emphasis added]. . . . Christ’s dominion over all things means our own full salvation. . . . Resurrection on the last day also means the fullness of the body of Christ: the heavenly church. . . . Jesus as definitive presence of salvation, and in this sense an eschatological event, has opened to us a hope of the last things; and these, as well, are definitively concentrated in him by whom, in the Spirit, we have access to the Father (Ladaria 1994:273-4).*

There are other definitions of eschatology in this twenty-first century. These definitions focus on the “the hope within us” from 1 Peter 3:15 (Sauter 1999); the *Future as God’s Gift* (Fergusson and Sarot 2000); the continuity and discontinuity expressed by the Christian hope found in the Natural Sciences, the Cultural Sciences, Ethics, Biblical Traditions, Theology, and Spirituality (Polkinghorne and Welker 2000; Polkinghorne 2002); the concept that *God Will Be All in All* (Moltmann 1996; Bauckham 2001); and *The Last Things: Biblical and Theological Perspectives* (Braaten and Jenson 2002). Gerhard Sauter consolidates these modern ideas on eschatology best by writing the following:

Both Moltmann and Pannenberg understand eschatology as a theology of history. For Pannenberg, world history is a unified structure whose interrelations can be discovered through its center; which is the resurrection of Jesus Christ . . . Moltmann is also influenced by an idealistic philosophy of history . . . he puts a much stronger emphasis on the political struggle by which history is pushed forward. . . . This is why I confront . . . the type of eschatology that can be described as a “theology of history,” . . . with two other important types. . . . Albert Schweitzer is credited with naming the first type *konsequente Eschatologie* . . . American and English speakers use “consistent eschatology,” . . . eschatology can only be understood as the expectation of imminent events . . . a global catastrophe through which the kingdom of God breaks into our reality

in order thoroughly to transform it. . . . The second type of eschatology I call “radical eschatology.” “Radical” means “to go to the roots,” and an eschatology that is radical in this sense . . . asks for the deepest reason and foundation of Christian hope, in which it is grounded on God’s acting. . . . Both conceptions as well as the theology of history type may be confronted with yet another version of doing eschatology, the perception of *God’s promise as a pledge by which God points us in the direction where we must set out*. Hope is what we receive through *justification* . . . This is why we must consider the relationship between justification and hope as well as the relationship between God’s promise and our future: this is the task of eschatology (1999:xii-xiv).

All of this academic study of eschatology focuses almost exclusively on eschatology alone (the events surrounding the Second Coming/*Parousia*), and not on relating the Second Coming of Christ back to His First Coming. For the most part, that academic body of work does not address the Eschatological Gospel of Both Comings of the Lord Jesus Christ. However, for the purposes of this thesis, a combination of the Zodhiates and Ladaria definitions of eschatology will be used: Christian eschatology is the study of last things, End Times or final events surrounding the *Parousia*, Second Coming or Advent of the Lord Jesus Christ. It is an aspect of the salvation proclamation; it is “gospel” in the purest sense of the word. The *Parousia*, therefore, is the consequence of His resurrection; that future coming is the full realization of the salvation whose foundation is in the victory Jesus has already won.

The Gospel is understood from two Greek words—*euangelion*, meaning “a good message, good news, the Gospel of Jesus Christ,” (Zodhiates 1992:669) and *martyreo/martyria*, meaning “to witness”/“a witness,”—understood to be: the good news or witness about Jesus Christ coming to redeem/restore humanity back from sin into right relationship with God (Verbrugge 2000:485). According to Holmes and Gerhard Kittel and Gerhard Friedrich, the definition is as follows:

In the New Testament the term *euangelion* is based on the Hebrew word *besorah* which means “good news.” What is to be proclaimed is not new. It has been known since the time of Isaiah. But now it is to be proclaimed. *The new feature is not the message but the*

eschatological act of proclamation. The message brings the new thing, the proclamation (Kittel and Friedrich, 2:726).

The question of whether or not Jesus used the word euangelion is finally a question of his messianic consciousness. If He realized that He was the Son of God who must die and rise again, then He also realized that He was Himself the content of the message of His disciples. In this case His gospel is not a new teaching; He brings Himself. What is given with His person constitutes the content of the Gospel . . . The common use of euangelion implies a direct continuation of the proclamation of Jesus. It is the preaching of the community along the lines of Jesus (Kittel and Friedrich, 2:728).

The message concerning the person of Christ demands faith and repentance. Jesus proclaims good news and calls men to repent for this is the way of joy. This is the way to salvation and eternal life. *Thus the very proclamation of the good news of Christ is an eschatological event as it announces the salvation of all who will believe. (Mark 13:10; Matthew 24:14; Mark 16:15.) . . .* The message of the Christ event is itself salvation history as it breaks into man's life and refashions and recreates" [emphasis added] (Holmes 1972:14, 15).

The Gospel is also understood by New Testament theologians as the "Kerygma" or preached message about Jesus (Elwell 1998:70). Kerygma is transliterated from the Greek noun *kerugma*, which comes from the verb *kerusso*, meaning "to preach, discharge a herald's office, cry out, proclaim." Specifically, *kerugma* means "sermon, message, proclamation, with suffix – *ma*, it means the result of preaching, that which is cried by the herald, the command, communication, proclamation of the redeeming purpose of God in Christ (Rom 16:25), the proclamation of Jesus Christ (1 Cor 1:21; 2:4; 15:14; 2 Tim 4:17; Titus 1:3)" – (Zodhiates 1992:861). Thus, gospel and kerygma are nearly synonymous. Ladd stipulates that since the resurrection of Jesus was an eschatological event and the starting point of the Christian church, then "it is itself an eschatological community with an *eschatological message*." This *Eschatological Kerygma* is mostly understood by the preaching of the Gospel carried out by the newly commissioned Apostles of the newly formed Christian Church in the Book of Acts [emphasis added] (1974:327-8).

This Eschatological Gospel is then one of the four basic Christological trajectories addressed by Helmut Koester in his essay “The Structure and Criteria of Early Christian Beliefs,” mentioned in Karkkainen’s book *Christology: A Global Introduction* (2003:21). It is also a part of the eschatological Christologies of Johannes Weiss (1971:129-31); Albert Schweitzer (Mozley 1951:87-9, 95-6, 114-17); Rudolf Bultmann (1957:19-21, 28, 33-54, 63-73, 138-54); Jürgen Moltmann (1967:16-7, 225-29; 1993:340); Wolfhart Pannenberg (1977:66-73, 106-8); and Bart D. Ehrman (1999:120-1, 139-55, 163, 183, 207, 227, 239, 244-5).

Hobbs called it, “The Gospel of the Blessed Hope” and defined it further:

To the early Christians belief in the second coming of Christ was not a matter of speculation and controversy. Rather it was a *gospel to be proclaimed as making meaningful the entire scope of the Christian message*. . . . If this event was of such vital importance to the original heralds of salvation, not in the field of dialectics, but as a *message of assurance and hope*, should not modern evangelists rescue it from the realm of division to make of it the *factor of unity that gives completeness to our gospel*? To that end, therefore, let us consider “The Gospel of the Blessed Hope” . . . We see, therefore, the vital place that the *gospel of the “blessed hope” occupies in every phase of life. It gives meaning to the broad scope of history, to our personal redemption, and to the practical element of evangelism. To this end let us exalt it not as a subject of debate and speculation, but as the incentive and end of holy and effective living* [emphasis added] (1957:13, 16).

Holmes labeled it, “The Gospel of the *Parousia*” and defined it below:

Fundamentally, the content of the gospel is the death, resurrection, ascension, mediation of Christ in heaven, *and the return of Christ*. (See Acts 2:14–38; 3:12–26; 4:8–12; 5:29–32; 10:36–43; 13:16–41.) This content is further enlarged and articulated in the entire New Testament canon. . . . *The return of Christ is thus the “good news” which must be proclaimed to modern man* . . . For this study, therefore, the term “gospel” refers to that *Biblical message of grace and good news which declares the parousia of Christ to be the divine alternative to contemporary man’s anxiety and hopelessness* . . . *Eschatology points to the very center of the Gospel message. To eliminate it would be to remove completely the element of hope and anticipation. A de-eschatologized Gospel is no Gospel at all, for there is no hope in a salvation that is bound to this world* [emphasis added] (1972:16-17, 79).

Beker labeled it “Paul’s Apocalyptic Gospel” and further defined it as:

. . . The abiding center of *Paul's gospel is the conviction that the death and resurrection of Christ have opened up a new future for the world. This future climaxes in the reign of God as that event that will bring the created order to its glorious destiny according to God's promises.*

In the second place, Paul's proclamation of the gospel conforms to its apocalyptic shape. He was able to *preach the gospel of God's coming glory in such a way that it inserted itself into the concrete and various particularities of people's lives. And so he enabled people to discern the glorious rays of the coming kingdom and to work redemptively in the world in order to prepare it for its glorious destiny. . . .*

Paul's apocalyptic gospel is constituted by certain apocalyptic components that he derives from his Jewish apocalyptic world and that he radically modifies because of his encounter with Christ and the Christian tradition that he inherits [emphasis added] (1982:29-30).

Beker chose apocalyptic versus eschatologic because "the use of the term apocalyptic clarifies the future-temporal character of Paul's Gospel," and apocalyptic "refers more clearly than the term 'eschatology' to the specificity and extent of the end-time occurrence" (1982:14).

Ladd labeled it as the "Eschatological Kerygma," found in Acts or the Primitive Church, and summarized it by an excerpt from C. H. Dodd's book *The Apostolic Preaching* (1944:28-35):

First, the age of fulfillment has dawned. . . (Acts 2:16; 3:18, 24) . . . The apostles declared that the *messianic age has dawned.*

Second, this has taken place through the ministry, death, and resurrection of Jesus . . . (Acts 2:23).

Third, by virtue of the resurrection, Jesus has been exalted at the right hand of God as the messianic head of the new Israel (Acts 2:33-36; 3:13).

Fourth, the Holy Spirit in the church is the sign of Christ's present power and glory. . . (Acts 2:33).

Fifth, *the messianic age will shortly reach its consummation in the return of Christ.* . . (Acts 2:33).

Finally, the kerygma always closes with an appeal for repentance, the offer of forgiveness and of the Holy Spirit, and *the promise of salvation, that is, of the life of the Age to come to those who enter the elect community.* . . (Acts 2:38-39) [emphasis added] (Ladd 1974:329).

For the purposes of this thesis, the Eschatological Gospel incorporates both comings/advents of Jesus Christ (just as the resurrection and ascension of Jesus finds salvific completion and fulfillment in the Body of Christ at the resurrection/Rapture of the Church as part

of the *Parousia*) to establish the kingdom of heaven/God (*malkut shamayim*) on earth inclusively, coincidentally and cohesively together into the one and same Gospel or Kerygma message from God to humanity about how to restore relationship with Him and spend eternity with Him in the age or world to come (*olam habbah*). A simpler way to put it would be that the Eschatological Gospel is the Gospel of Both Comings of the Lord Jesus Christ to establish the kingdom of God in the lives of humanity by restoring its relationship with God.