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GOD'S GOVERNMENT AND ITS IMPLICATIONS FOR THE CURCH  
IN THE CONTEXT OF THE MODERN WEST

Preliminary Notes on a Developing Study

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## INTRODUCTION

Did you ever feel that there must be more to the Christian life than accepting Christ, obeying the basic principles of the Bible, praying, going to church, tithing, and serving in some church activities? Do you ever wonder why, if Jesus came to give us “life more abundantly” you’re still just trying to make it through each week? Is there a tiny voice deep inside your soul that occasionally whispers that you’re missing something? When you read the book of Acts, did you ever wonder, “Why don’t those cool miracles happen in our church?” Have you ever noticed how Christianity is viewed by the general population as one religion among many equals and wished you had a way to convince the whole world that our Christian faith is different? Have you ever felt that the way we do “church” somehow isn’t quite what it should be?

If you answered “yes” to any of the above questions, then this paper will be of interest to you.

### WHAT DOES IT MEAN TO BE A CHRISTIAN?

Jesus is far more political than He is religious. Therefore Jesus never intended to start a religion, but to do something much more vast and awesome. Jesus came to demonstrate what life is like under God’s government which He called the “Kingdom of God” or the “Kingdom of Heaven.” Jesus also came to be the long-awaited Deliverer, winning the greatest military victory in the history of creation - the victory over the forces of darkness, enabling humans to become citizens of His nation. Finally, He came to appoint and train officers and ambassadors who would initiate legislative assemblies in every community of the earth. Thus God’s rule would continue to expand throughout the earth, bringing spiritual and physical wholeness wherever it was received and embraced.

In the following document I will attempt to share some of the insight the Lord has been giving me on the awesome reality of God’s Government and of our place in it as His elected officers.

### The Bible: Religious Book or God’s Constitution?

#### Religion

*Dictionary.com* defines religion as “a specific fundamental set of beliefs and practices generally agreed upon by a number of persons or sects: the Christian religion; the Buddhist religion.”<sup>1</sup> Religion means “respect for what is sacred, reverence for the gods.” It is “the belief in and worship of a god or gods” or “a set of beliefs explaining the existence of and giving meaning to the universe, usually involving devotional and ritual observances, and often containing a moral code governing the conduct of human affairs.”<sup>2</sup> Webster traces the Latin root *religio* to the meaning “supernatural constraint, sanction, perhaps from *religare* to restrain, tie back.” In ancient times it meant “scrupulous conformity, conscientiousness.”<sup>3</sup> The Greek word is θρησκεία (*threskeia*)

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<sup>1</sup> Dictionary.com, Religion: <http://dictionary.reference.com/browse/religion>. [June 2010].

<sup>2</sup> Wikipedia.com, Religion: <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Religion>. [June 2010].

<sup>3</sup> Merriam-Webster.com, Religion: <http://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/religion> [June 2010].

which is rendered “ritual” in the literal translation.<sup>4</sup> Monroe defines religion as “adherence to a set of beliefs that regulate the oral, social and ritualistic behavior of the individual.”<sup>5</sup>

According to a search done on *Bible Gateway* using the NIV version, the words “religion” and “religious” appear nine times in the New Testament. Of these, not once does it define a follower of Christ. Four times it refers to moral behavior and three of these occur in one single statement found in James: “If anyone considers himself religious and yet does not keep a tight rein on his tongue, he deceives himself and his religion is worthless. Religion that God our Father accepts as pure and faultless is this: to look after orphans and widows...” (Jas 1:26,27). The other five occurrences in the New Testament refer to Jewish or pagan philosophies and practices.

It may be noted that Jesus hardly ever had a positive thing to say about the religious leaders, the Pharisees. More than the demoniacs, more than the pagan Romans, more than the prostitutes, Jesus was continually, unashamedly and diametrically opposed to the religious leaders. Jesus hung out with those considered to be the most immoral of his day. He pardoned prostitutes and healed pagans and made tax collectors and rough fishermen into disciples; but He referred to the Pharisees with scathingly condemning terms including “nest of snakes,” “whitened tombs full of corpses” and “children of hell.” Moreover, He went out of His way to defy as many religious rituals and condemn as many “traditions of the elders” as possible. Clearly Jesus wasn’t very religious. Newbigin says, “When the New Testament affirms that God has nowhere left Himself without witness, there is no suggestion that this witness is necessarily to be found in the sphere of what we call religion.” He goes on to say, “the parables of Jesus...speak of secular experiences...the text...constantly suggests that it is religion which is the primary area of darkness.”<sup>6</sup>

Let’s step back in time to Genesis and the creation account. The very first thing God said to the man and woman was, “Be fruitful and multiply; fill the earth and subdue it; have dominion over the fish of the sea, over the birds of the air, and over every living thing that moves on the earth” (Gen 1:28). God gave the man and woman dominion or rulership of the earth. He instated them as king and queen of the earth. Adam and Eve were intended to be king and queen of the kingdom of Planet Earth. That was a political contract; nothing religious about it. Of course this authority was contingent in their remaining in submission to God Himself, which they failed to do. Thus they surrendered into the hands of the enemy their authority along with the kingdom God had given them.

The in Gen 12 God spoke to Abraham. He didn’t say “I will make you a great religion,” but “I will make you a great *nation*” (Gen 12:2). God birthed a nation. Was this nation’s allegiance to God ever meant to become a religion? Or was it intended to remain a government, a theocracy, a “nation under God”?

Throughout the Old Testament, there were two types of leader; kings/judges, and prophets. Good kings ruled under God’s authority, serving primarily as simply an oracle

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<sup>4</sup> Scripture4all.org, Online Interlinear New Testament: <http://www.scripture4all.org/OnlineInterlinear/NTpdf/jam1.pdf>. [July 2010].

<sup>5</sup> Myles Munroe, *Kingdom Principles: Preparing for Kingdom Experience and Expansion*. (Shippensburg, PA: Destiny Image Publishers, Inc, 2006), 12.

<sup>6</sup> Lesslie Newbigin, *The Gospel in a Pluralist Society*. (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1989), 172,173.

for God through whom He ruled the nation. Bad kings took matters into their own hands and departed from God's sovereignty. So the greatness of the kings and judges throughout the Bible was in their willingness to govern God's way, to ensure that God's government and not man's was in office.

Therefore the Ten Commandments and all the ensuing laws that we perceive as religious, were not religious at all. Rather, they had three very political purposes: First they were to encourage the people to keep God in office as their King. Secondly they were to show them how to live under the rule of this King. Finally they were to help them see their inability to do either. **Thus the Old Testament is primarily about God's politics. It's not about religion, but about being a nation under the leadership of the King and Creator of the universe.**

### **Prophets and Priests**

The primary role of prophets was to keep kings tracking with the King and to advise them regarding national affairs. Even the prophesies of the Messiah were political in nature.

Note that there are very few stories about priests, while entire books in the Old Testament are devoted to tracing God's deeds in and through the lives of national leaders (Abraham, Moses), judges (Gideon, Samson, Deborah), kings (David, Solomon, Hezekiah) and governors (Joseph, Daniel, Nehemiah, Esther). Entire books also record the words of prophets (Isaiah, Jeremiah, Ezekiel) and of anointed kings (Psalms, Proverbs, Ecclesiastes). As noted earlier, prophets such as Samuel, Nathan, Isaiah and Jeremiah played a vital role in the lives of national leaders. However priests seem to have only one expression; to perform the symbolic rites that served to atone for the nation's sins. Neither did they have an inheritance with the rest of the community but lived on the tithe (Num 18:20,21). More on priests later in regard to Christ.

So the Old Testament is primarily a political book - a record of the history of God's plan for humankind to govern the earth under Him as He governs the universe. The Old Testament is a record of the forming of a nation under God, of that nation's attempts and failures to demonstrate His Government to the world. The New Testament is nothing but a continuation of the story - God's personal appearance to demonstrate and initiate that Kingdom in a new age.

Monroe accurately summarizes what we have noted thus far: "The Bible is about a King, a Kingdom and a royal family of children. The Bible is not about religion and was never intended to be a religious book...the Bible...is about government and governing."<sup>7</sup> **The Bible is "the constitution of the Kingdom of Heaven."**<sup>8</sup>

### **Messiah: Religious Savior or Political Deliverer?**

One of our most beloved verses foretelling our Lord Jesus is "For to us a Child is born, to us a Son is given, and the government will be on His shoulders. And He will be called Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace. Of the increase of His government and peace there will be no end. He will reign on David's throne and over his kingdom, establishing and upholding it with justice and righteousness..." (Isa 9:6,7). Note the marked absence of "religious" terms. The only

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<sup>7</sup> Munroe, 42.

<sup>8</sup> Munroe, 61.

specifically religious term in these passages is the word “God.” Now note the richness of political terms – “Counselor,” “Prince,” “reign,” “throne,” “kingdom,” “justice,” “judgment”... and “government” occurs twice. No wonder the people of His day didn’t recognize the suffering Savior; according to this, they were to expect a political leader like King David. What they missed was that this King had a much bigger enemy to conquer than Rome. He had to conquer Satan himself. And because He had a different enemy, He also had to use a different way of fighting than did King David.

Most of us agree that Jesus is the Messiah, but few understand what that meant in the context of His day. As could be expected from the above passage, the Israelites were expecting a political leader who would pick up a sword and defeat the Romans. After all, didn’t it say He would sit on David’s throne, and didn’t that mean the greatness and glory of Israel in David’s time would be restored? Throughout their three years with Jesus even the disciples persisted in thinking He would eventually use force to overcome the Romans and re-instate Israel’s sovereignty as a nation. All that was sent for a tailspin when, in complete contradiction to all expectations, He meekly allowed Himself to be crucified. Their hope revived when He was resurrected. “Lord, are you at this time going to restore the kingdom to Israel” (Acts 1:6) were the last recorded words of the disciples before Jesus ascended.

Sourcing passages in Isaiah about the suffering servant, our traditional understanding is that the “Messiah” first had to be a religious deliverer in the sense of delivering us from sin, and later in the “second coming” He will bring physical deliverance. But really, were the disciples all that far off in thinking He was a government leader even in His first appearance? Is this age we call the “age of grace” intended to be limited to “religious” activities and is Jesus’ activity during this age primarily of a “religious” sort?

## **Salvation: Religious Act or Legal Transaction?**

### **Legal Transaction**

To explore that question we first need to ask what, really, is our salvation all about? Is it religious or is it political? Paul said the purpose of the Law was to lead us to Christ (Gal 3:24). Note: “**Law**,” too, is a political word, not a religious word. The Law – as does any law - showed us where we departed from God’s ordinances. God’s Rulebook/History Book teaches clearly that “all have sinned (missed the mark) and fall short of the glory of God” (Rom 3:23). Now, if the penalty for falling short of God’s expectations were a slap on the wrist then it would not be a big issue. However this Government, God’s Government, decrees that “The soul who (misses the mark) shall die” and “the wages of (missing the mark) is death” (Ezek 18:20, Ro. 6:23). Now there is a problem because this Government will now have to wipe out the entire race. So the Deliverer was God’s solution to this legal problem.

Let’s hesitate here to note that many words which we who have been immersed in church culture for many years perceive as religious, were not religious at all in their original form. Take “**justify**,” that is a courtroom word, as is “judgment” and “justice.” “**Redeem**” and “**salvation**” are equally non-religious. Redeem means “to recover ownership of by paying a specified sum”<sup>9</sup> and thus has its roots in economics. The words

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<sup>9</sup> The Free Dictionary, Redeem: <http://www.thefreedictionary.com/redeem>. [July 2010].

for “salvation” in both Hebrew and Greek don’t mean only salvation from sin. *Yasha*, the root of Joshua and of *Yeshua* from which we get “Jesus,” means “to be wide, or roomy - a broad and spacious place.” Thus it conveys the idea of freedom and liberation. In Greek the word *sozo* or *soteria* meaning “cure, recovery, remedy.”<sup>10</sup> So in its original interpretation, salvation meant political liberation and physical wellbeing. The first and foremost step in true liberation and wellbeing is to know the living God through faith in Jesus Christ. But it doesn’t end there. That is the essential foundation, but it is just the beginning of what God intends us to experience as members of His Kingdom. Only because of our tradition have we come to view these words through the narrow blinders of mere religion.

#### COMMON BIBLE TERMS WHICH ARE POLITICAL IN NATURE

- Kingdom (of God – the primary term Jesus used to refer to what He came to [re]establish on earth)
- King (Jesus is King of Kings, i.e. President/Prime Minister of the universe)
- Lord (Jesus is Lord of Lords i.e. Supreme Ruler of all creation)
- Christ (Messiah – term denoted a political deliver like King David)
- Jesus (*Yeshua* or *Yahoshua*, the "Lord who is Salvation")
- Elect (inducted into a place of government authority and responsibility to serve the community, promoting the decrees of the Constitution)
- Ambassador (a person who represents his country and lobbies for its policies in another country)
- Gospel (to announce a military victory)
- Evangelize (to announce a military victory)
- Law
- Church (*Ekklesia* – legislative assembly)
- Salvation – to be set free from oppressive government / a legal transaction in which Jesus paid the penalty for our offences
- Judgment
- Justice
- Redeem
- Ransom
- Prophet – (advisor to the king - provided primarily military and administrative direction)
- Sin (breaking the law – resulted in military defeat, economic ruin and political oppression)
- Repentance – primary requirement to restore military victory, self-rule and economic prosperity

<sup>10</sup> Grace Valley Christian Center, Salvation:  
[http://members.dcn.org/gvcc/sermon\\_trans/salvation\\_booklet.html](http://members.dcn.org/gvcc/sermon_trans/salvation_booklet.html). [July 2010].

When the Deliverer arrived, John proclaimed, “Look, the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world” (John 1:29). John was using strong cultural terminology that would have been clearly understood by those around him; sacrificing a lamb was how God had, in the Old Testament, ordained that the penalty for their wrongdoings should be symbolically paid. However it is also clear that “it is impossible for the blood of bulls and goats to take away sins” (Heb 10:4). *Yeshua*, the Deliverer, was the true vicar, bearing the legal penalty of our guilt so we could be ransomed, redeemed, justified. Jesus was the King Himself paying the just consequences that His Laws and His righteousness required.

So, is our salvation more accurately described as a religious action (remember, the word “religion” means “ritual”)? Or is it a legal transaction? Now perhaps we can clearly see it - our salvation is a legal transaction, the price to redeem us from the just penalty of the Law as decreed by the Government of God, the King of the universe. There was no ritual about it. It was real, it was unique, and it was an act of utmost grace and love. It was the true King doing something no King ever did - ransom His people by substituting Himself. No mere religion can claim its leader ever did such a thing.

### **Military Victory**

But it gets better! Not only was our salvation a legal transaction, it was also a military victory. It would probably take Frank Peretti to write a book that would paint in words the awesome clash of powers that was going on throughout the time Jesus walked on the earth. What an incredible movie it would make, to show behind the scenes what was happening in the spirit realm, the seething battle that must have been raging between the forces of darkness and the forces of light. Sensing something was brewing, the darkness wanted to kill Him before the time. Moreover, if only He could be caused to break His own Law, He would be disqualified from being the legal Substitute. Their reign would be secure and their human slaves doomed for eternity. But the legions of the evil one failed. They couldn't get rid of Him as an infant, nor could they disqualify Him as an adult.

But when the time came, the forces of light which stood with Him against the darkness were commanded to step back. The darkness swooped in to torture and slay the Prince. The greatest party ever to take place in Hell must have been going on from Friday through Saturday...until it was blasted apart by a roaring inferno of glory when He rose from the dead! The legions of darkness hadn't counted on a resurrection. “And having disarmed the powers and authorities, He made a public spectacle of them, triumphing over them by the cross” (Col 2:15) and “The reason the Son of God appeared was to destroy the devil's work.” (1 Jn 3:8). Can you hear the legions roaring? The battle of the ages, the war for the eternal lives of the King's beloved children, was fought and won when the King made His throne a cross. The greatest military victory in the universe was won when the King conquered death and secured eternal joy for His nation. There is nothing religious about it.

## Jesus: Rabbi or King?

### Christ

Now let's get right to the point and ask, "Who did Jesus perceive Himself to be, what did He really come here to do, and what did He expect His followers to do and be?" He asked Peter "who do you say that I am" and Peter said "You are the Christ, the Son of the living God" (Mt 16:16). Χριστός means "the anointed" and is the Greek equivalent of מָשִׁיחַ or "Messiah." Remember, Messiah originally meant a political liberator, not a religious leader. Remember also that Gabriel said to Mary "you are to give Him the name Jesus, because He will save His people from their sins" (Mt 1:21). For a Jew, saving them from sin meant two things: It meant spiritual salvation, but more acutely in their minds it meant the restoration of the nation as it was in the glory years under King David. When a Jew thought about "salvation" they envisioned not just a spiritual redemption but a total redemption. They envisioned physical prosperity, political justice, spiritual fullness and national peace. Thus **the Messiah was to be a liberator from sin and also from the consequences of sin on a much broader level - a governmental level, not just a religious level.** Messiah was to be a King, the King who would bring about a total environment of blessedness.

### Evangelism

What was Jesus anointed to do? Quoting Isaiah, He Himself told us very clearly: "He has anointed Me to preach good news to the poor. He has sent Me to proclaim freedom for the prisoners and recovery of sight for the blind, to release the oppressed, to proclaim the year of the Lord's favor" (Luke 4:18,19). Note that for our rendering "preach good news" there is actually one word, *euaggelizesthai*. In Jesus' day when a battle was won someone went running through the land "**evangelizing**," that is proclaiming the good news of the victory. **So even this "evangelism" – a word which today we view as exclusively religious - is not religious at all but entirely political, a shout of military victory.** Jesus was about to win the greatest military victory in the history of creation. There was indeed something to evangelize about!

Apart from that particular phrase "preach the good news" which appears to us by our English translation combined with our tradition to mean something religious, there is nothing religious about Jesus' mission statement as given in Luke 4. It is, rather, all about exactly what the Jews expected the Messiah to be and do: liberation, justice, restoration and peace. It sounds like Jesus came to take everything that is wrong in life and make it right again.

### Other Terms

- **Priest or Priests** in New Testament
  - 160 occurrences total
  - 118 - Jewish or heathen priests - 99% is negative (Mt 27:1, Mark 14:1, Luke 19:47, John 19:6, Acts 9:14, 14:13, etc.).
  - 36 - book of Hebrews - to help Jews accept Christ
  - 5 - Believers - excepting 1 Pet 2:5, the term is always paired with a political word (1 Pet 2:9, Rev 1:6, 5:10, 20:6).
  - 1 - Paul refers to his ministry as a “priestly duty” (Rom 15:16)
- **Rabbi** - occurs 16 times, usually disciples referring to Jesus (Judas especially uses it). It simply means “Teacher,” like a student saying “Professor” - a term of respect. Jesus says “call no one Rabbi” and never refers to himself as such. The word Rabbi isn’t seen even once after the Gospels.
- **Prophet** - occurs 157 times. Jesus is recognized as a prophet (Mt 21:11, Luke 4:24, John 4:19 etc.). The term is almost always used in a positive way except when warning of false prophets.

### Priest

Did Jesus see Himself as a religious leader? One of our core doctrines today is that Jesus is “our great High Priest,” “a Priest after the order of Melchizedek,” who “entered the holy place taking His own blood” and therefore “does not have to make atonement again and again as do human priests” etc. It may however be surprising to note that every one of those well-known passages is from one single book in the Bible - Hebrews. In fact, not once in the rest of the New Testament is Jesus ever referred to as a priest. The word “priest” occurs 160 times in the New Testament and is usually used negatively except in the book of Hebrews. Every time the word is used in the Gospels except for a few occasions where Jesus told a person He healed to “go show yourself to the priest,” it is used in a negative sense. It was the priests who vehemently opposed Jesus and finally secured His death. It was the priests whom Jesus called “brood of vipers,” “whitewashed tombs” and other politically incorrect epithets.

Priests were temporary. The primary reason God instated blood sacrifices was to prepare people for the true Sacrifice which would have to be made to genuinely ransom humankind. Priests were necessary because a bull, goat or lamb doesn’t sacrifice itself. But once that great Sacrifice had been made, priests would be no more. There would be no more need for symbolism since the real thing had happened. Moreover, priests went to God on behalf of sinful people. Once the ransom had been paid, all who believe could approach the Father directly through His Son. There are many passages throughout the Bible that point to Jesus as the sacrifice. In fact these can be found all the way from Genesis where the serpent would bruise the heel of the woman’s seed, to Isaiah’s suffering servant, to John’s “behold the Lamb of God” to Revelation’s “lamb in the midst of the throne looking as if it has been slain.” Jesus was the sacrificial Lamb and the High Priest, wrapped into one because He voluntarily went to the cross, i.e. offered Himself.

I suggest that “Priest” was never intended to represent Christ’s primary identity. Any good orator takes into consideration the position and worldview of his audience. The writer of Hebrews - obviously - was writing to Hebrews - Israelites, Jews, whose whole culture revolved around the system of priests and sacrifices. Therefore the Holy Spirit moved him to maximize their culture to reveal Christ to them in their own language - the language of the priesthood. However the fact that Jesus isn’t referred to as a priest anywhere else in the Bible and most markedly not in the Gospels should further confirm the fact that He didn’t see Himself as a religious leader.

### **King of All**

So if Jesus didn’t see Himself as a religious leader then what did He see Himself as? Peter was highly commended for calling Him “Messiah, Son of the Living God.” Messiah or Christ meant a deliverer like David (“The government will be on His shoulder... He will reign on David’s throne and over his kingdom...” Isa 9:6,7), only He would be a deliverer who would deliver the whole person, not just the physical person but also the spiritual, bringing about total restoration.

Then, to say He was “Son of God” basically was restating that He was a Prince, a King, but a King on the level of God not man, a King who would rule forever with justice and mercy and righteousness that would spread over the whole earth. He was not King only of religious groups. Dutch theologian and statesman Abraham Kuyper said “there is not a square inch in the whole domain of human existence over which Christ, who is sovereign over all, does not cry ‘Mine!’”<sup>11</sup> At the annunciation Gabriel said Mary would have a Son who would “be called the Son of the Most High. The Lord God will give him the throne of his father David, and he will reign over the house of Jacob forever; his Kingdom will never end” (Luke 1:32,33). Then at His birth the angel said “Today in the town of David a Savior has been born to you; He is Christ the Lord” (Luke 2:11). These are an “enthronement formula”<sup>12</sup> - the crowning of a new King to bring in a new age.

All these things taken together, it would be safe to say that Jesus perceived Himself primarily as the King - not of the earth but of the universe, on the level of God not man. And because His Kingdom was “not from here” therefore He ruled in a way most contrary to what man expected.

### **Our Faith: A Religion or God’s Government?**

This King vehemently condemned most things considered to be religious while at the same time having surprisingly little criticism for the pagan government under which His sect the Jews were oppressed. Moreover, He was constantly talking about the Kingdom. The word Kingdom pertaining to descriptions of “the Kingdom of God” or “the Kingdom of Heaven” occur 143 times in the New Testament, NIV version. Interestingly, this is more than the words “saved,” “savior,” “salvation,” “redeem,” and

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<sup>11</sup>William D. Romanowski, *Eyes Wide Open: Looking for God in Popular Culture*. (Grand Rapids: Brazos Press, 2007), 52.

<sup>12</sup>Walter Brueggemann, *The Prophetic Imagination, 2nd Edition*. (NP: Fortress Press, 1978/2001), 103.

“redemption” put together. Clearly there is something about the Kingdom that Jesus wants us to get. The Kingdom, not salvation, is the core of His message.

#### **Word Occurrences Matthew through Revelation**

1. Kingdom, referring to Kingdom of God	143
2. Salvation	42
3. Save or saved, referring to salvation from sin	70
4. Redeem or redeemed	8
5. Reconcile (referring to salvation)	6
6. Total of 2 through 5	126

The entire recorded content of Jesus’ first “sermon” if you will, was “Repent for the Kingdom of Heaven is at hand” (Mt 4:17). He didn’t say “Repent for the Religion of Christianity is at hand.” Neither did He say “Repent for salvation from sin is at hand.” Jesus had a bigger vision. It was a universal vision that would impact not only the spiritual but the whole person, the whole culture, the whole environment. Jesus was a King, so He had the outlook of a king, an outlook that saw the big picture.

Now...

**What I am going to try to demonstrate next can release you into a whole new dimension of victory, power and influence. The devil does not want you to read the rest of this document because if you take it seriously, you will break free of the biggest chain with which God’s people are bound and don’t even know it.**

#### **The Lord’s Prayer**

The disciples asked Jesus, “Teach us to pray.” Jesus’ response was not intended merely to be put to memory and recited. It was an outline for life, a prioritization of activities and purposes on which daily life, indeed the universe, was to be based if it were to be in accordance with the desires of the King. He began by saying “Our Father in Heaven, holy is Your name.” Always, allegiance to our King is the first priority. The first commandment is “Love the Lord your God with all your heart...”

Now, note carefully the second priority. The very next thing Jesus said after “Our Father in Heaven, holy is Your name” was “Your Kingdom come, Your will be done on earth as it is in Heaven.” It is not “give us today our daily bread” though that is usually what we end up putting as the next priority - asking God for our needs and wants. But Jesus tried here to teach us that the next priority immediately after recognizing our King, is that His **Kingdom should come on earth as it is in heaven**. There it is again - Kingdom!

What does this mean “Your Kingdom come, Your will be done on earth as it is in Heaven?” Remember, Jesus is the Prince who just came from the side of the Father. It was through Jesus that all things were created before the universe existed. He had lived in

this heavenly Kingdom for millennia. The vision of its glory was fresh in His mind even though He was now a man bound by human flesh. When He said we should pray for the Kingdom to be actuated on earth as it is in Heaven, I think He was seeing a vision. He was envisioning the glory He knew with the Father being manifested on the earth. He was seeing the joy, the harmony, the wholeness, the love, the triumph over darkness, the purity and victory of Heaven manifested on the earth. This was His mission – to initiate something that would result in at least a little piece of that glory happening on earth. His disciples were blind to it, but He tried in the only way He could to communicate it to them.

Just a bit further on we find Jesus saying “Seek first His Kingdom and His righteousness and all these things will be given to you as well” (Mt 6:33). There is a key here to true prosperity. If we only understood the Kingdom, many things would change in our lives. Many view Jesus as a good teacher, and orthodox evangelicals view Him primarily as the Savior from sin. However Jesus purpose on the earth was much more. He came to demonstrate the Kingdom. He was the King showing us what His Kingdom would look like on earth as it is in Heaven. He brought a new Law and a new Rulebook, a new code by which to live. He showed us how to love and how to forgive. And then He demonstrated it in the most graphic way, by the Cross. Everything He did was to demonstrate the Kingdom, what life could be like if only we were to grasp what He was trying to teach us.

### **The Glorious Vision Lost**

Using a *Bible Gateway* search<sup>13</sup> there are almost five pages of references in which Jesus spoke of the Kingdom, but throughout the remainder of the New Testament there are only a little over two pages of references to the Kingdom. We might wonder why the Kingdom was so heavily stressed by Jesus but was noted far less by the Disciples and Paul. Perhaps even early on the concept that Jesus intended to establish began to be lost as human nature pulled us toward a tragic lapse into a mere religion.

Today, if we were to ask a typical person walking down the street or shopping in the mall to name the major world religions, he or she will rattle off, “Christianity, Islam, Hinduism and Buddhism.” They may add a few others and some view Catholicism and Christianity as two separate religions. But almost invariably Christianity is the first “religion” people mention in the West. Try the question in the Middle East and Christianity will probably rank second behind Islam and try it in Asia and it will likely rank second behind Hinduism or Buddhism. Whatever the case, throughout the whole world, from pastors to prostitutes, “Christianity” is universally viewed as (merely) another religion along with Islam, Hinduism, and the rest.

Because we couldn’t conceive of this “Kingdom” Jesus was trying to show us, we made it into a mere religion. Jesus tried to tell us that the Kingdom is like a treasure hid in a field which, when a man finds it, he sells everything and buys the field (Mt 13:44). The Kingdom is more precious than anything in this life. But because we failed to see it, the enemy has succeeded in getting us to think it is limited to religion. “The end of the royal fantasy will permit a glimpse of the true King who is no fantasy, but we cannot see

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<sup>13</sup> Bible Gateway, Kingdom: [www.biblegateway.com](http://www.biblegateway.com), NIV version of the New Testament. [July 2010].

the real King until the fantasy is shown to be a fragile and perishing deception.”<sup>14</sup> **For centuries we have bought the deception that our faith is a religion and until that fantasy is exposed for what it is, we can never see the King, His Kingdom and our place in it.** A blind person attempting to paint a portrait will probably make something that only slightly resembles a person and is not the least attractive. Likewise we, unable to see or understand the Kingdom, have mutilated it or at least interpreted it as something far less than it was intended to be.

So what, exactly, is the Kingdom supposed to be or look like? God’s rule, God’s reign, fine. But how are we to apprehend it?

To help us in this endeavor, let us turn to the subject of the Church.

## WHAT IS THE CHURCH REALLY SUPPOSED TO BE?

### **Church: Synagogue vs. *Ekklesia***

If there is one passage in the Bible that is second in importance to John 3:16, it is most certainly **Matthew 16:18** – **“On this Rock I will build My (Church) and the gates of hell will not prevail against it.”** Why is this verse so vital to our lives as followers of Christ? Because it is the only place where we can learn exactly what Jesus intended the gathering together of His people to look like. It is the only place where Jesus tells us what this institution that we call “church” should be. It is the only passage in which we can get direction straight from Jesus as to how He envisioned His people to carry on after His departure.

**A close look at this passage reveals something shocking that will radically change your view of “church.” If you don’t want to be shaken up and to be compelled into an uncomfortable place of dissatisfaction, then stop reading right now and find the nearest trash barrel and throw away this document.**

### **Kuriakon and Synagogue**

Our word “church” is from the Greek “*kuriakon*.” This word is used only twice in Scripture - 1 Cor 11:20 The “Lord’s (*kuriakon*) supper;” and Rev 1:10, the “Lord’s (*kuriakon*) day.” This statement itself should raise a red flag for the reader, as we know that our English translations have “church” occurring far more than twice. “Church” comes from Old English *cirice*, *circe* and Middle English *chirche*. “*Ku-ri-os*” means “lord” so “*kuriakos*” (i.e., “church”) means “*pertaining to the lord*.” A church, then, is something that pertains to, or belongs to, a lord.

So what is the other word in the New Testament that our English versions render “church”? The word is *ekklesia*. It is first used by Jesus when He says “...upon this rock I will build My church (*ekklesia*)” (Mt 16:18). We commonly understand this word means, “called-out (ones)” in that it is a compound of “*ek*” (out of) and “*kaleo*” (called). On this we base a large portion of our concept of God’s people as the ones who have been called

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<sup>14</sup> Brueggemann, 46.

out of sin, called out of darkness, called out of death to inherit eternal life through Jesus Christ.

This is also supported in the Old Testament as God's people were first called out of Ur (Gen 12:1), called out of Egypt (Ex 12:17, Hos 11:1 etc.) and called out of Babylon (Is. 48:20, Eze 36:24 etc.). This is all well and good. However what we fail to ask is what did the word mean in the context of Jesus' community and culture. Then we would know more specifically what Jesus was trying to communicate.

Before we delve into the real meaning of *ekklesia*, let's take a step back and consider the word *sunagoge* or synagogue. The synagogue was the place where the people of Israel gathered to worship God and to learn the Torah. It was the common place where followers of the true God came together to do pretty much the same thing we do today in our churches. Jesus participated in synagogues throughout His life. Early in His ministry He stood in a synagogue and read from the book of Isaiah. Later He often taught in the synagogues, and recognized the temple as "My Father's house." So it would seem that when it came to a designation for the future gatherings of Jesus' followers, He would have simply called these gatherings "Synagogues of Jesus" or perhaps "Messianic Synagogues." But He didn't. He chose a completely different word. He chose "*ekklesia*."

Synagogue means "*a gathering*" with *syn* meaning "together" and *ago* meaning "bring" i.e. "bring together." There was no particular purpose to this gathering, it was simply a generic term for people getting together. Synagogues were primarily a religious gathering and remember Jesus never came to start a religion. He is King of Kings. Why would the King of the universe limit Himself and His followers to something merely religious? His intention was total conquest of society. His vision was for God's Government to be established throughout the earth in the same way as it is in heaven. When we see this then we can also see why the word *synagogue* was not nearly sufficient to describe what Jesus' elect officers were to be and do.

### **Ekklesia**

What then does this word *ekklesia* mean? According to the *Oxford English Dictionary* it means "*A regularly convoked assembly, especially the general assembly of Athenians.*"<sup>15</sup> Roxburgh says "It wasn't a religious word but rather a political word meaning 'a public assembly'."<sup>16</sup> The *Encyclopedia Britannica* defines it, "in ancient Greece, assembly of citizens in a city-state."<sup>17</sup> The *Ekklesia* was "the principal assembly of the democracy of ancient Athens during its 'Golden Age' (480–404 BCE)."<sup>18</sup> It was "The governing body of the Athens democracy."<sup>19</sup> It had "final control over policy,

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<sup>15</sup> Oxford English Dictionary.

<sup>16</sup> Alan J. Roxburgh and M. Scott Boren, *Introducing the Missional Church*. (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 2009), 71.

<sup>17</sup> Encyclopedia Britannica, History and Society: Ekklesia: <http://www.britannica.com/EBchecked/topic/177746/Ecclesia>. [May 2010]. "Its roots lay in the Homeric agora, the meeting of the people. The Athenian Ecclesia, for which exists the most detailed record, was already functioning in Draco's day (c. 621 bc). In the course of Solon's codification of the law (c. 594 bc), the Ecclesia became coterminous with the body of male citizens 18 years of age or over and had final control over policy, including the right to hear appeals in the *hēliaia* (public court)..."

<sup>18</sup> Wikipedia, Ecclesia: [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Ecclesia\\_%28ancient\\_Athens%29](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Ecclesia_%28ancient_Athens%29). [May 2010].

<sup>19</sup> Adrian Varalack. "Ecclesial Identity - The Ekklesia: What the Church, the Body of Christ Was and Should Be," 2009, Adrian Varalack, Cleveland, TN, 2.

including the right to hear appeals in the *hēliaia* (public court), take part in the election of archons (chief magistrates), and confer special privileges on individuals.” Assemblies of this sort “existed in most Greek city-states, continuing to function throughout the Hellenistic and Roman periods, though under the Roman Empire their powers gradually atrophied.”<sup>20</sup>

Here are what some other sources have to say about this word: Bosch says it means “a town meeting of the free Greek male citizens.”<sup>21</sup> Flynn says “The Classical Greek word used in the Scriptures that is translated church is the word *ekklesia* and means ‘an assembly of citizens in a city for legislative or deliberative purpose.’ The word was used to describe a gathering of citizens with full rights in legal assembly to conduct the business of a city or state (McKenzie 1995, 133-134).”<sup>22</sup> There was nothing religious about an *ekklesia*. “The central events of the Athenian democracy were the meetings of the assembly (ἐκκλησία *ekklesia*)... The assembly had four main functions; it made executive pronouncements (decrees, such as deciding to go to war or granting citizenship to a foreigner); it elected some officials; it legislated; and it tried political crimes.”<sup>23</sup>

**Therefore Jesus’ vision was purely and completely governmental in nature.**

From all of the above, it should be abundantly clear that the word Jesus used was rich with political meaning, giving His followers not only a very important identity as citizens of His nation, but also an essential purpose of serving the community and of outreach to extend God’s government to new areas. Most interestingly for hardboiled “churchgoers” is the fact that the word Jesus used had no religious connotations at all. In other words, **Jesus never intended the gatherings of His people to be merely or even primarily a religious service.**

*Ekklesia* appears about 115 times in the New Testament. Except for three times, it is incorrectly translated “church.” The three exceptions are Acts 19:32, 39, 41. In these instances the translators correctly rendered it “assembly” and the context was an actual Greco-Roman *ekklesia* - a judicial gathering in which the worshippers of the local goddess wanted to do away with Paul and his companions. The pagan city clerk (a member of the *ekklesia*) handled the situation with notable wisdom resulting in the release of the apostles (Acts 19:35-41). In these occurrences, the Greek word *ekklesia* is exactly the same as in the other 112 appearances in which it was changed to “church.” **Thanks to the mistranslation of *ekklesia* into “church” the rich meaning has been buried for centuries and lost beneath a heavy shroud of religious tradition.**

But what does this mean for us? How should this change what we do and how we conduct our lives as Christ followers?

### **Orientation: Inward vs. Outward**

Jesus always taught by demonstration. He walked on the water before expecting Peter to do it. He multiplied the fish and bread before expecting His disciples to do it. He

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<sup>20</sup> Encyclopedia Britannica, History and Society: Ekklesia: <http://www.britannica.com/EBchecked/topic/177746/Ecclesia>. [May 2010].

<sup>21</sup> David J. Bosch, *Transforming Mission*. (Orbis Books, New York. 1991), 165.

<sup>22</sup> James Flynn, *A Well Furnished Heart: Restoring the Spirit’s Place in the Leadership Classroom*. (Fairfax, VA: Xulon Press, 2002), 282.

<sup>23</sup> Wikipedia.org, Athenian Democracy: [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Athenian\\_democracy](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Athenian_democracy) [April 2011].

healed people and drove out demons and only later sent His disciples to do it. So most certainly Jesus would not tell us to do something that He didn't first demonstrate. Moreover, if we find ourselves doing something that Jesus didn't demonstrate then we have reason to consider that it might not be in accord with what He taught.

So where did Jesus ever demonstrate *ekklesia*? Where did He demonstrate God's government and God's legislative assembly?

I suggest that whatever Jesus did and wherever He went, He was demonstrating God's government. Most depictions of Jesus teaching show Him lecturing a sedentary audience. However Pasolini in his film *The Gospel According to St. Matthew* depicts Him teaching as he leads His band of disciples, like a military commander at the front of the battle.<sup>24</sup> When He healed people and drove out demons, He was demonstrating that in God's government demons and sickness have to flee and the result is wholeness and peace. Whenever He taught the laws of the Kingdom, He was demonstrating how to live as a citizen of God's Nation, the Kingdom of God. He was "demonstrate(ing) for His disciples how they could legally function as His Ecclesia in His absence," thus "allow(ing) the public to see God with His people, living, working, serving among them, and empowering them to proclaim and model the good news of the Gospel before the watching world."<sup>25</sup> So whenever we see Jesus with His disciples, He was demonstrating *ekklesia*. Whenever He was with His disciples, He was training His elected officers, preparing them to rule and to execute the precepts of Gods government in the earth.

Notice that almost everything Jesus did was OUTSIDE of any religious building. He taught in the synagogue, however only two of His miracles happened there. Every awesome act He did - from walking on water to feeding the 5,000 to healing the leper to dying on the cross - was done out among the people, out where the sinners were. Even His personal time with the disciples was primarily in the presence of other people, those who weren't yet His disciples. All of that was "church" Jesus' way, the incarnation of God's Kingdom. Roxburgh notes that "most churches operate with structures designed for a time when church was firmly at the center of life."<sup>26</sup> This is true, but I suggest it needs to be taken further. Even when church was at the center of life, we didn't have it right. We were still doing religion and the reason we thought it was working was because people were still filling the pews. Roxburgh adds that in those days, churches grew because of sex, loyalty and time.<sup>27</sup> Today, people have fewer babies, less loyalty and much less time. Empty pews are a very good way for God to get our attention. Why are the pews becoming empty? Murray puts his finger on it when he says, "The Church, in calling them to seek salvation for themselves, must have kept hidden from them the great purpose for which they were redeemed – that they should live to save others."<sup>28</sup> If churches were what they should be, they would still be growing today because believers would be intentionally out among nonbelievers, and nonbelievers would be joining God's Nation (getting saved) by renouncing the laws and deeds of the enemy (repentance) and by pledging allegiance (confessing faith) to their King, Jesus the Anointed One.

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<sup>24</sup> Newbiggin, 240.

<sup>25</sup> Varalack, 5.

<sup>26</sup> Roxburgh, 80.

<sup>27</sup> Roxbugrh, 82.

<sup>28</sup> Andrew Murray, *Key to the Missionary Problem*. (Fort Washington, PA: Christian Literature Crusade, Inc., 1996), 34.

How can we begin to shift our elephantine religion of *synagogues* to become, as Jesus intended, “the connecting link between the dying Savior and the dying world?”<sup>29</sup> If you are so fortunate as to be ministering in an unreached part of the world where for the most part the people haven’t already been contaminated with religious Christianity, you have a wonderful and awesome opportunity to grow an *ekklesia* from the ground up with very little baggage to get rid of. However the big question is how should established American *synagogues* become more legislative in nature, or how should an American church planter start an *ekklesia* when he knows many of the people who join it are likely to be transfers from something that resembles a *synagogue*? McNeal notes that groups which begin with an “IN-UP-OUT” focus or even with an “UP-IN-OUT” focus rarely ever get the “OUT” to happen. However those which begin with “OUT and “UP” accomplish the goal of an outward-focused organism and have no problem adding the “IN” focus of fellowship and mutual edification later on.<sup>30</sup> Early in the life of any would-be *ekklesia*, “OUT” must be nurtured and celebrated because outreach, not just personal growth, is the end goal of what Jesus intended His people to be and do.

**When believers gather together, the normal course of events shouldn’t focus on singing songs or listening to a preacher whose job it is to preach. The focus should be “to celebrate the work of God in the life of the community, mainly through hearing stories of what God is doing right now in the lives of those present and in their relationships with others.”**<sup>31</sup> For all believers, “training in missionary service” should be “part of their education in the love of Christ and the life of godliness.”<sup>32</sup>

How can this be cultivated? McNeal suggests we need to start by “changing the scorecard for the church.”<sup>33</sup> He gives two lists of activities which we will quote here as it is a useful tool to help a leader grasp the shift that needs to take place. McNeal speaks of churches going from an “internal” to a “people development” focus in a similar way as this paper has referred to “synagogues” vs. “*ekklesias*.” A church that is externally focused or in other words “missional” is a genuine *ekklesia*. One that is internally focused is merely a synagogue, a religious institution.

According to McNeal, the activities of an internally-focused church center on the following:

- Number of people involved, attending or participating
- People recruited for church services
- Church activities
- Spiritual disciplines
- Money gathered and spent on church needs
- Church turf
- Church-centered “opportunities for growth”
- Staff devoted to program management

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<sup>29</sup> Murray, 143.

<sup>30</sup> Reggie McNeal, *Missional Renaissance: Changing the Scorecard for the Church*. (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 2009), 63.

<sup>31</sup> McNeal, 61.

<sup>32</sup> Murray, 25.

<sup>33</sup> McNeal, 67.

Now compare this with the scorecard for a church which is focused on people development:

- Relationships that people are intentionally cultivating
- People released into service
- Personal life development
- Money spent on people rather than buildings and administration
- Life turf (home, work, school, community, etc)
- Life-centered growth
- Staff engaged in coaching people for personal development<sup>34</sup>

I suggest a true *ekklesia* needs to add to the above list more items promoting active outreach into the unsaved community, both local and foreign. The above list still contains too much “IN” thus endangering losing sight of the precious “OUT” dimension.

### **Worship: Religious Service or Service to God?**

I don't think Jesus ever dreamed that His people would come to a point where they spend one of the two precious hours a week they reserve just for Him sitting in a religious building. Not that worship through song and the preaching of the Word is wrong but it is simply overemphasized while other meaningful forms of worship aren't brought to the awareness of the typical churchgoer. Jesus said “there will be more rejoicing in heaven over one sinner who repents than over ninety-nine righteous persons who do not need to repent.” (Luke 15:7). The “ninety-nine righteous persons” was a sarcasm directed at the religious Pharisees. To update it to our day, we may suggest that the passage could read: “There is more joy in heaven over one sinner that repents than over ninety-nine Christians sitting in a pew singing ‘I'll fly away’”... or even singing a top contemporary worship chorus or listening to a sermon. It doesn't matter what we're singing or hearing a message, the point is we're inside a religious building (*synagogue*) instead of out there where Jesus was, finding lost sheep (*ekklesia*).

How can we shift from seeing song singing and preaching in a building as the primary way to “worship God” to seeing from Jesus' point of view? *Websters* defines worship as simply “reverence for a divine being.”<sup>35</sup> Reverence is more an attitude than an action. For me the most holy moments of reverencing God happen every night as I lie down in my bed and adore the beauty of His love demonstrated in the Cross. Another optimal environment for me in which to reverence Him is out exercising in the wilderness, in His pure creation. Some find their best opportunity for reverence when they are with a congregation, perhaps singing songs or hearing a message. But in order to be valid, attitude must lead to action. Out of our times of reverent attitude should flow the action of reverence which is obedience and outreach. Worship was meant to be “an extension of normal routines, not something that is a discontinuity with the rest of the week.”<sup>36</sup> The Message Bible renders Rom 12:1 “take your everyday, ordinary life – your sleeping, eating, going-to-work, and walking-around life – and place it before God as an

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<sup>34</sup> McNeal, 112.

<sup>35</sup> Merriam-Webster, Worship: <http://mw3.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/worship>. [July 2010].

<sup>36</sup> McNeal, 61.

offering.”<sup>37</sup> Thus it was never intended to be a “service.” “Service as in “worship service” seems to be a dreadfully religious concept that I am almost certain Jesus would never have used. I feel the two words are in fact incongruous. You cannot have true worship in the environment of a religious service because Jesus never wanted religion. He said worship was to be done “neither on this mountain nor in Jerusalem.” In other words, no religious places and no religious services. Instead, Jesus said “the true worshipers will worship the Father in spirit and truth” (Jn 4:21,23).

We are admonished to “Pray without ceasing” (1 Thes 5:17). This we understand to be a continual attitude of love and communion with God. Likewise worship is a continual honoring of God - not only in attitude but in deeds. So worship would be more accurately defined as “...acts of honor in recognition of God’s worthiness” or “acts of obedience to (God).”<sup>38</sup> But not only is work harder than singing and preaching, it is also far less attractive to our lower nature. Therefore humans do religion exceptionally well and amazing amounts of effort go into preparing the worship service - far more than go into honoring God where it really matters - out in the community.

### **Believers: Religious People or Government Officials?**

What then does all this mean for believers, for our personal, day-by-day existence? It means first of all that **we are not merely sinners saved by grace. We are elected officers in God’s government.** In fact, we are intended to govern the earth as God governs the universe. We quite literally “reign with Christ” (Rev 20:4). That means much more than just being saved. It is not about who has been “selected by God to escape judgment and get in the lifeboat to heaven called church.” It is about being “chosen by God to represent Him for the sake of the world.”<sup>39</sup> Roxburgh puts it this way: “We have lost the call to a salvation that not only saves us *from* sin but saves us *for*...the way of life that He intended in the midst of the mess of the world.”<sup>40</sup>

How are God’s officers to rule? The same way He did; by demonstrating God’s authority over Satan by healing and deliverance, by teaching the laws of God’s Government (the Gospel) and by “doing good” (Acts 10:38). We are to execute His rule by demonstrating the principles of the Kingdom - love, mercy, justice, forgiveness. We are also to vehemently condemn evil and take a stand for righteousness even when it isn’t popular or politically correct. We are not, as so many religious Christians suppose, intended to refrain from judging, but we are called, in Jesus’ footsteps, to execute “righteous judgment”(John 7:24) like Jesus did against the Pharisees... and all the more as we see our own nation, America, forsaking the principles of God’s Government by which she became great. Abandoning our “refuge theology,” we are to “conduct forays into the kingdom of darkness with His Kingdom of light.”<sup>41</sup> Jesus came not to start a religion but a community that would “embody and announce the presence of the reign of

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<sup>37</sup> Romanowski, 51.

<sup>38</sup> McNeal, 60.

<sup>39</sup> Roxburgh, 42.

<sup>40</sup> Roxburgh, 103.

<sup>41</sup> McNeal, 34.

God.” The Church is to be “partners with Him in challenging the powers of evil and bearing in its own life the cost of the challenge.”<sup>42</sup>

Earlier we noted that Jesus is the Christ or “The **Anointed One**.” Kings were also anointed. This was because they had a specific and essential purpose to fulfill, a service to perform in God’s government. There is a story about a soldier in the army of Alexander the Great who was a coward and ran from the battle. The king punished him - not so much for running from the battle as because his name was also Alexander. Because he bore the name of the king, his cowardice brought shame to the great warrior. If we call ourselves Christians but do not have our highest purpose to expand His kingdom, then we are no better than that soldier. We bring shame to the name of our King, who endured torture and death to redeem us from our enemy and to re-instate us as governors of His Kingdom on earth.

**Anointing in the Bible was never so that a person could just make it through his own life.** It was so they could influence the lives of others. It was a setting apart, a “calling out.” **It was a commissioning and an empowerment to expand the Kingdom.** Jesus’ last words were not “pray for people to be saved” or “start a bible college” though all these things are good and important. His last words according to Matthew, and therefore possibly the most important words He ever spoke, were “All power in heaven and earth is given to Me, therefore go and make disciples” (Mt 28:18,19). Jesus, the King of Kings, the Creator of the universe, who had now won the great battle by substituting Himself and so destroying the power of the enemy, was now giving that same awesome authority to His elected governors. He was equipping and sending us forth to spread His government of justice, love and righteousness, in the same way as He had throughout His time on earth.

According to Luke, when the Disciples asked Jesus if He would now defeat the Romans and restore the nation of Israel, He answered “No” and then added “But you will receive power... and you will be My **witnesses**...” (Acts 1:8) The disciples were still thinking Jesus would do something more Himself. Instead He swiftly transferred the focus to what *they* would do in response to what He already had done. **Witness is not a religious word but a judicial word.** A witness testifies before the judge based on what he has seen. As it played out, we see that the disciples “went forth, and preached everywhere, the Lord working with them, and confirming the word with signs following” (Mark 16:20).

**Most of us miss the most exciting part of being a follower of Christ because we never really grasp the great and glorious destiny He has for us. We are like a soldier who never goes out to the battle but stays in the camp, and lives on beans his whole life, and sits sharpening his sword day after day and wondering why life is so boring.** A follower of Christ who thinks the main thing is going to church, studying the Bible, and otherwise doing what all humans do – raise a family, work a job, try to get ahead... is living “inside the camp.” But he enters the battle when he comes to see himself as a warrior every minute, every hour, wherever he goes, having the purpose of spreading light, dispelling darkness, helping others, changing lives, all in the name and for the glory of his Lord, Jesus. Thus he discovers his destiny of expanding the kingdom, and life takes on a whole new and higher level of meaning and purpose.

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<sup>42</sup> Newbigin, 134.

A follower of Christ who doesn't discover this is like a miserable soldier who eats the same old porridge day in and day out. He reads of others victories but wins none himself. Were he to go out and conquer some enemies, he would be feasting on the meat and fruit of their spoils. Were we to pursue the expansion of God's Kingdom above all else, we would discover the riches of glory, the awesome miraculous power of God flowing through us to do exploits, and we would have "meat to eat that (the world) knows not of."

A follower of Christ who doesn't receive this vision to expand God's Kingdom is like the soldier who continually sharpens his sword but never goes out and finds an enemy on which to use it. He remains in the bible study group, ever sharpening his own Bible knowledge and feeling as if he is not yet sharp enough to do any damage to the enemy. The fact is he only needs to get out and start using his sword, and then the living presence of the Mighty Warrior will "work with him, confirming the word with signs following" and he will see the victory like he never would have believed.

Also a follower of Christ who doesn't see the Kingdom vision will probably not suffer much. He will remain unscathed by enemy sword or spear. He may glide easily through without much risk or challenge on behalf of the Gospel. In the natural realm of job and family and health he may suffer as any human may, however he will not incur wounds on behalf of Christ, and therefore will not really know his Lord. "Can he have traveled far who has no wound, no scar?"<sup>43</sup>

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<sup>43</sup> Amy Charmichael.

## SUMMARY

### **Our Purpose: Our Own Salvation, or to Influence All Spheres of Society?**

Salvation is like the birth of a baby. A child is born into the royal family of God's Kingdom, a precious life rescued out of darkness but also inducted into a new nationality, a new system of government, a new purpose and destiny. But if we never go on from salvation to discover that purpose, then we are like a child who never grows up. Ask a teenager whether he wants to get his driving license and you will get an exuberant "Yes!" Ask him if he wants his parents to ride with him forever and he will cry "No!" The teenager wants to attain the full functionality of adulthood. Does adulthood also come with struggles and problems? Of course; but that doesn't prevent a normal healthy young person from wanting to grow up. Growth is natural and maturity brings with it the ability to contribute productively to society. If we all remained babes, there would be no society as we know it and all would soon become extinct.

Therefore once one has been "saved" we should not linger long on this fact any more than a child thinks about his birth. The fact is we are here, our King has saved us out of the enemy kingdom, so now let's get about the work of rescuing others and demonstrating God's Kingdom wherever we go! "The goal of Biblical conversion is not to save souls apart from history but to bring the Kingdom of God into the world with explosive force. It begins with individuals but is for the sake of the world."<sup>44</sup>

Is God interested only in us influencing "religious" aspects of life? Not by any means. Jesus said "You are the salt of the earth...you are the light of the world." Being salt in the world means "working to enrich culture and preserve life-affirming aspects. We are also called to be a light to show the way for cultural development, uncovering and disentangling forces for good and evil, working to restrain evil and advance redemptive potentials by redirecting unhealthy or destructive patterns toward principles in line with loving God and serving our neighbor."<sup>45</sup> Woven in and through that, our purpose is to influence others toward joining the Kingdom through allegiance to our King and His laws. "To gather in to Christ the souls He died to save is the one object for which the Church exists."<sup>46</sup>

If we grasp this new world view, this new perspective on life then things will be shaken wherever we go. How many of our churches today or even evangelists can be accused of "caus(ing) trouble all over the world" (Acts 17:6) or "turn(ing) the world upside down" (NKJ). No churches or preachers that I know of can be accused or credited with such influence. There have been revivals but there are often questions as to legitimacy. There have been great preachers and healers but often they succumb to scandal and their testimony is marred. Even the greatest revival was primarily limited to the religious arena. Some resulted in transformed societies as in the Welch Revival but this was the exception. What we are doing in the name of "church" or "evangelism" rarely ascends to such a place as to shake nations. But whatever the early apostles did

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<sup>44</sup> Glasser, 174.

<sup>45</sup> Romanowski, 54.

<sup>46</sup> Murray, 61.

resulted in people saying they were not only shaking nations but “turning the world upside down.” What, then, were they doing which aroused such a stir?

The answer is found in the next passage. **The apostles were accused of “defying Caesar's decrees, saying that there is another king, one called Jesus” (Acts 17:7). This reveals something truly fascinating: Whatever and however the apostles were presenting Jesus, they were presenting Him in such a way that the community understood Him to be a political leader, a King, and such a powerful and present King as to threaten the current government of Caesar.**

What does this mean for us? It means that we are called to influence all spheres of society. Our “ministry” is not contained to mere religious activities. We are not being “spiritual” when in church and just normal when out working our job or going to the grocery store. If we have a Kingdom focus, then whatever we go and wherever we go we will see ourselves as influencers of society for God’s purposes. **Our daily joy and excitement should be to go forth, with Him working with us, to see what life we can touch with His love, to see what darkness we can oppose, what person of influence we can impact for righteousness, what Kingdom principle we can promote.** If we work in a factory or a school, a hospital or an auto shop, that is our personal mission field and our commission is to develop an *ekklesia* there or at least to bring the Kingdom of God into the atmosphere of that business or workplace. If we are a student in a high school or college, our purpose is the same. **The church meeting is primarily a place to come to be prepared for the battle, to be equipped and trained for the task. The church meeting is also a place to celebrate what God has done through us during the week. It is not, however, the main event in our lives as followers of Christ.**

So go now and discover what it means to be a government officer instead of a religious person.

Go as His ambassador, elected to a royal post and anointed with His power.

Go and demonstrate His principles which defy all of man’s wisdom.

Go and transform your world as a representative of your King.

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