

Is This Really What Jesus Had in Mind?

The Status of the Great Commission

“I am not here to move people to the ‘prosperous land’ of America. I am here so that they can have a promised land, a Home with Christ in heaven. A Home He is even now preparing,” begins one of the many prayer letters I receive from the missionaries I support. For many years I, along with most supporters of modern Evangelical missions, have read statements like this one and never considered the underlying presupposition that forms them. Is the goal and focus of Christian mission merely to provide the lost with a “home in heaven”? Does the Christian mission begin and end with bringing people into a personal relationship with God, whatever that may or may not look like? Since the end of World War II Evangelical Christians have been highly successful at spreading Christianity throughout the globe. Where fifty years ago Protestant Christianity barely registered on census data in many non-Western countries, increasingly the two-thirds world is filled with churches claiming allegiance to Christ and placing trust in salvation by grace alone. Today well over half of the Christians in the world do not live in Western Europe or America, the historical home of Christianity.

But how successful has the Christian mission really been? While the formerly “unreached” peoples of the earth today have an indigenous witness of Jesus Christ in their midst, Christianity has often been subsumed into the existing culture and ethos. Non-Western Christians are often uninterested in challenging the existing power structures that in many cases continue to hold the rest of the population in bondage to non-Yahwistic practices. Further, the living conditions in many of the “bright” spots of Evangelical mission have not dramatically improved since the entrance of Christianity. Life expectancy, literacy, woman’s suffrage, health-care, just courts and other related “civilized” benefits that have followed Christianity in the past are not flowering in these harvest lands of the gospel. But why, and does it really matter? Not according to one of the leading mission thinker of the past 50 years, Donald McGavran. McGavran feels that the vertical relationship with God is the primary and, in fact, only goal, and other issues may actually interfere with this primary task:

Salvation is a vertical relationship... which issues in horizontal relationships... The vertical must not be displaced by the horizontal. Desirable as social ameliorations are, working for them must not be substituted for the biblical requirement of/for "salvation" (Bosch 1991:398-399).

In mission magazines and conferences today there is much talk about "success" as McGavran defines it within the modern mission movement. But what is the appropriate measure of success for a task that has been going on since at least 33 AD? This question and the reality of social conditions throughout the world today are challenging Evangelicals and the basis of missions thinking. They have asked: "Is not the gospel holistic in the sense that it concerns all aspects of life, ranging from the individual to the community and from economics to politics?" (Glasser 1989:29). These questions and challenges demand a new comprehensive focus.

The Kingdom of God- A Measuring Tool for Modern Mission Theology

The question of what is the mission of the church has been wrestled through since early days of the Christian movement. In each stage in the life of the church the issue has played itself out in many forms. For the early church the key question was whether lapsed Christians were still within the grace of God. In the middle ages it was how to pursue holiness in the midst of squalor, depravation, and ignorance, while during the Reformation, the question was by what means did salvation occur. In the great century of Christian missions during the 1800s it was how to make the name of Jesus known amidst pagans, Buddhists, and Muslims. Today's church is still wrestling with what the mission of the church is to be.

Throughout the centuries one driving concept has served to keep the church focused and on-track with the message of Jesus Christ: the Kingdom of God. It may be the single most mentioned topic within scripture, and yet even today the question of what is meant by the kingdom is hard to answer. Pinning it down is both vital and liberating to the modern church, for the kingdom is not just important to the future of the church; it is the future.

The first people of God came to see the Kingdom of Yahweh/God as central to their covenant hopes. While the people of Israel often behaved in ways counter to the covenant, the promise of the coming Day of the Lord, the day of his kingdom, continued to draw people back to the one God.

No single topic was more present in the recorded words of Jesus when he walked the earth than the kingdom (Arias 1984:8). He used the kingdom to describe his mission as well as the mission of his followers. He painted illustrations of kingdom life in parable after parable, and the social reality of the kingdom permeated his teachings and actions. The kingdom was what Jesus was about. Because of Jesus' focus upon the kingdom, the church should likewise be focused upon the kingdom, not merely as the goal and acme of the mission, but as the rod against which the success of the mission movement has to be measured.

But what is the kingdom? What does the church perceive it to mean? And how can it be a measuring tool for the disparate work of the Lord's church across the earth? During the course of the next four sections these issues will be examined. First, I will discuss a scriptural review of the concept of the kingdom, including various interpretations throughout history beginning with the birth of the nation of Israel. Next, I will develop a broad outline of why and how the kingdom should be used to measure the success and truth of modern mission thinking. Third, I will review a sampling of key mission thinking and test how these representative thinkers and their mission theologies measure up when compared with the Kingdom of God. Last, I will provide some recommendations on how we can move closer to being a kingdom mission church.

Scriptural Development - The Kingdom of God in the life of the People of God

The Bible is the primary source for Christian thought and doctrine. Given that reality, if the Kingdom of God is indeed a pivotal if not primary theme of scripture, it should be revealed in all forms and all portions of the Bible. Both Testaments provide key elements of the kingdom. The Old Testament, as the old saying goes, provides the walls of the doctrine of the kingdom, while the New Testament the roof. Both are essential to having a sound understanding of the kingdom, and both fail to adequately construct the doctrine without the other.

The Kingdom in the Old Testament

While the Old Testament recounts the narrative history of Israel, it also provides both the basic outline of the hope of the Kingdom of God as well as the introductory notes of this powerful hope. The book of Genesis provides a pre-history of the nation of Israel and ends with the children of Israel in the land of Goshen. It is there, some 400 years later that the Bible begins the history of the nation of Israel and the formative ideas of the Kingdom of God.

The Kingdom in the Pentateuch

As time passes for the Hebrews in Goshen, the ruling class in Egypt no longer finds their presence to be an amiable one. The children of Israel now live as slaves and a marked race. It is in this context that Yahweh sends Moses to lead them out of the foreign nation and into the land of the promised inheritance. Yahweh's actions in freeing Israel and leading them to the Promised Land reveal several important elements of his nature, a nature that will be cornerstone of his kingdom. Arthur Glasser writes that there are four basic themes that tie back to God's nature that can be seen in the Exodus from Egypt. Two of particular importance to the character of the kingdom are the centrality of God in the Exodus deliverance and the Exodus as political liberation (Glasser 1989:69-72).

How do these aid in the development of the doctrine of the kingdom? First, the centrality of God in the Exodus, and in fact in all liberating actions in Scripture, demonstrate that the Kingdom of God is not and cannot be initiated by human action. Moses' attempted first strike for the cause of the Hebrews (Exodus

2:11-15) led not to the freedom of the Israelites, but to Moses scurrying to the desert. While human participant is required in the establishment of the kingdom they cannot instigate it, and when humanity attempts to usurp God's role as initiator, the results are far from a holy kingdom (I Kings 14:20-26; 16:25-26 and many more verses from the books of history).

The concept of Exodus as political liberation makes many Evangelicals uncomfortable. The Exodus has provided the basis for questionable Black and Liberation theologies, where the gospel is seen as good news only for select members of society. But the Exodus is not about a liberation that changes slaves into cruel masters. Instead, the Hebrews are to see that their liberating could only have happened by the hand of God (Deut 4:34), that it was meant to instill an understanding of the God they served (Exodus 6:23), and that it was to become central to their faith and faithfulness (Glasser 1989:71). In point of fact, the Israelites were commanded to allow Egyptians who rallied to Yahweh to accompany them on the Exodus journey (Exodus 12:38,48).

After the miraculous escape of the Hebrews from Egypt Yahweh calls them to Mt. Sinai, where he prepares the people to become a nation. The political liberation that occurred in the land of Goshen will now be further explained, and in so doing provide even more evidence as to the nature of God's kingdom. While the Covenant Code given to Israel in Exodus 21-23 and Leviticus at first seems to be focused only on ritual actions, it is in truth filled with important regulations for conduct towards slaves, minority peoples, widows and other lesser members of society. Throughout the Covenant Code the rules established by God are not meant to bring societal upheaval that leaves the powerful powerless, but rather to create a complete community where all members are on equal standing.

Land, a symbol and tool of power and financial wealth, was distributed amongst the many peoples and was a gift from God therefore removing the potential of eternal accumulation. The Year of Jubilee (Leviticus 25) acted to keep this economic asset in the hands of those who most needed it, rather than simply allowing the powerful to gain more power. Further, the rules regarding planting and harvesting of these lands show God's greater desire that all members of his kingdom receive blessing, including the land itself (Exodus

23:10-11). Although this rule was rarely followed (Isaiah 5:8), the concept was to build a society where mutual helpfulness rather than oppression would characterize the people of God (Glasser 1989:78).

Slavery was another issue addressed in the Covenant Code and one which to our 20th century understanding would seem to have no place in the Kingdom of God. While the issue of slavery in scripture is a difficult one to untangle (and is beyond the scope of this paper), the rules regarding treatment of slaves are unique in the ancient world. There was to be no profound distinction between slaves and their master and his family. They were not to be regarded as inferior, and, though they were without official civil rights, they were to be regarded as part of the extended family of the master (Glasser 1989:78). Protection, not exploitation, was to be the rule for slaves, though again, the people of Israel rarely paid heed to these rules (Glasser 1989:78).

The commandments concerning widows, orphans, and minority peoples also provide clear glimpses of the character of the Kingdom of God. Non-Israelites who placed themselves under the protection of Israel (much as Israel had done four centuries earlier at the behest of Pharaoh) were to receive rights and privileges, as well as responsibilities. The Sabbath rules were to benefit the sojourner (Exodus 23:10-12) as well as the Hebrews. The gleaning of fields and vineyard were to benefit these most defenseless individuals. Again and again the Covenant Code provides explicit actions that the members of Israel must follow with regard to these less fortunates. In part, the treatment of these individuals would be the cause of much of Yahweh's anger, and bring down the forces of foreign powers upon them in judgment (Amos 5; Isaiah 59:1-19). Further, the prophets make a special point to include foreigners and the weak in the promises of the messianic age and the Day of the Lord (Ezekiel 47:22,23; Isaiah 49:6; 51:5 and others; see the next section for more information).

What do all these Covenant Code restrictions tell us about the Kingdom of God? While Israel was never to be seen as the kingdom (a problem that we will deal with in the next section), they were to be a people of priests and kings. Their role in God's plan was to reveal the Kingdom of God, and these many covenant rules that address not the power brokers' rights, but the responsibilities of the masses are key in introducing the kind of kingdom Yahweh is revealing. Arthur Glasser sums up the kind of society that the Covenant Code was designed to create and should encourage outsiders to believe in:

Israelite society was called to be an egalitarian society, that exalted labor, denounced idleness... furthered human reciprocity, justice, and an active concern for one's neighbors... The gracious God who had liberated them wanted them to never forget that they had been an abused and exploited minority people totally unable to relieve their own misery (Glasser 1989:78).

While the Exodus is not the totality of Israelite history, it is an important cornerstone. God's actions in liberating and forming the people and nation of Israel provides key insights into the nature of the kingdom that Yahweh will ultimately put in place. They include the sovereign activity of God and the communal character and societal responsibilities of his people—found in the two great commandments—to love God and to love neighbor (Leviticus 19:18, Deuteronomy 6:5). These two principals repeatedly appear in the recorded history of God's interaction with his people.

The Davidic Nation and the states of Israel and Judah

After the Exodus comes the conquering of Canaan and the period of the Judges. During this time a primitive theocracy exists, where Yahweh rules through the use of different judges (*shopet*) (Bright 1981:31-32). The reader of Joshua and Judges is exposed to acts of God's sovereignty (Joshua 5:15-21; 10:13-15; Judges 7 and others) and acts of man's amazing sinfulness (Judges 17-19). Yahweh again and again rises up to defend the people of Israel against attacks both external and internal. The reader does not see widespread ethical breakdown, but rather a collection of disparate groups with questionable moral responses and a failing trust in the iconoclastic monotheistic faith that they received from their forefathers. The Kingdom of God seems far away. At the request of Israel, God raises up not judges whom he appoints for short periods only, but kings. The nation of Israel arrives with the anointing of Saul and hits its stride with David.

What does the Davidic kingdom, and the later split kingdoms of Israel and Judah reveal about the character and nature of the Kingdom of God? Is the expected kingdom going to come in the form of a physical nation called Israel? Clearly, history would show that this was not the case, but for the people of Israel the misidentifying of the Davidic state for God's, and imagining that in it God **had** established his kingdom, would have significant impact on the future of their state (Bright 1981:43).

In the history of the nations of Israel and Judah, God provides many lessons on what his kingdom will **not** be like. Into that history Yahweh sends his prophets to speak to the many rulers and citizens of these nations, providing hope of what the true kingdom **would** be like.

In the aftermath of Saul's defeat and death at Mount Gilboa (1 Samuel 31), David assumes the leadership of the nation in near civil war. The first several chapters of 2nd Samuel detail David's growing control of the leadership of Israel and finally the centralization of political power in himself and in Jerusalem. Naturally, the worship of Yahweh is centralized as well, with Jerusalem becoming the only allowable center of worship of the one true God. Was this centralizing of worship proper? Nowhere in the many references to Yahwistic worship is the city of Jerusalem mentioned, and it appears that this movement towards one place of worship would facilitate the Israelite addiction to idolatry. The centralizing of worship in one place appears to be inconsistent with the nature of the kingdom (John 4:23).

Additionally, there was an increasingly bloated royalty, with many fine structures and the need for high revenues to support their kingdoms. Beginning with David's palace (2 Samuel 7:1), growing under Solomon when both the Temple and outside palaces were finely ornamented, and continuing under successive kings in both the north and the south, the once tent-dwelling people had moved to a high society that ruled and worshipped in fine "churches" of cedar and stone (Bright 1981:47). To finance these projects taxes were increased, slave labor was employed, and commercial treaties and projects were under-taken with princes and kings from nations of dubious spiritual and ethical position. The high taxes began in earnest under Solomon. While he is remembered as the great, wise king of Israel by many Christian boys and girls in Sunday school, the final years of Solomon's life leave little residue of these promising early days. He reorganized the land for the purpose of taxation, and put in place conscription, both unheard of prior to his reign (Bright 1981:46). His use of slave labor began with the foreigners, but soon spread to the freeborn, proud Israelites in order to complete his projects. Finally, in order to pay debts outstanding, he ceded Galilean towns to Hiram king of Tyre. The egalitarian system designed in the covenant was quickly breaking down.

The breakdown in the economic system also ushered in the breakdown of pure Yahwistic worship. Solomon was the first of many kings to engage in shipping and trading with the foreign powers that surrounded Israel (1 Kings 9:26). Beginning with him, and continuing through the history of the nation of Israel, these deals would bring foreign wives and foreign worship to the land of Israel. To seal such treaties, marriage to foreign daughters was called for by the proper politics of the day, and Israel's foreign policy fell in line with the accepted practices. Solomon and his foreign wives would foster the growth of foreign religions (Bright 1981:47), and in the process break with both the Ten Commandments and others of the Covenant Code (Exodus 20:3;22:20).

Not only did these foreign alliances help to maintain the riches of the kings, they would later be the building blocks for military alliances. These military alliances would become the source of Israel's hope when facing nations such as Aram, Assyria, and Babylon. Foolishly, the kings of Israel and Judah would push the hope of the kingdom further from Yahweh (in stark contrast to the theocentric hope of the Exodus), and towards alien states and gods.

The egalitarian society of Yahweh's covenant was in dire trouble at the time of Solomon's death. His son, when faced with the issue, chose not to return to the intended structure, but to continue down the course his father had set out. The civil war that followed split the kingdoms, and began to highlight two additional offenses against the kingdom- injustice and improper understanding of Yahweh's character. These two offenses would become not only the undoing of the peoples of Israel and Judah, they would also become two of the major themes that Yahweh's prophets would address and use to frame the nature of God's kingdom.

The injustice of both Israelite and Judean society is hard to fathom by late 20th century American standards. While there are still instances of injustice in American culture, there is not the clear demarcation between powerful and helpless that was present far too often in the societies of Israel and Judah (and their neighbors). John Bright paints the following picture:

...as in Solomon's day, society is sick. Only now the sickness is unto death...There is wealth unheard of, which knows every luxury money can buy, and there is bitter and hopeless poverty. There are greed and venality which have no conscience, but place property above men and above God (Bright 1981:59).

The control of wealth led to the desire to maintain control, and slowly but surely the rights and welfare of the least powerful in society were eroded, courts failed to act, especially in regard to land matters. The system of fairness and righteousness outlined to the people of Israel in the desert had broken down. But this did not only touch the civil elements of society. As the quote from Bright points out, the religion was crumbling under such depravity as well.

The name of Yahweh was to be associated with righteousness, mercy, justice, wrath, and above all holiness. The nation, in its role of priest and kings, was supposed to relay Yahweh's nature (and the nature of his kingdom) to the outside. Since the time of the civil war and the establishment of two kingdoms Yahweh's desire that all the world would know his nature was being undermined. Baal worship had seeped into the nations, along with the previously mentioned gods of the allied states. But what was worse was that the name of Yahweh was being overlaid on the theology and practices of these neighboring pagan religions. Yahweh, God of Israel, became, in the minds of many, all too much like Baal (Bright 1981:51). These pagan religions did not only bring in such detestable acts as child sacrifice (Jeremiah 7:31), and other such high profile crimes, but they also gave cover to the immoral actions of the government and the elite. Bright also paints a startling picture of this religious depravity:

...The shrines are busy and rich and thronged with worshippers. But religion is a mechanical quid pro quo, a nauseous attempt to purchase material favors of God with material gifts. It tolerates the grossest immorality; it utters no rebuke—provided only that one support his church! It is totally at the service of the state, and will countenance no criticism of it (Bright 1981:59).

The name of Yahweh had become attached to things which not only had not been intended as part of his kingdom, but in fact were clearly against the stated nature of that kingdom. The kingdoms of Israel and Judah had done the opposite of their prescribed task. Rather than announce the nature of Yahweh's coming kingdom, they relayed the message that Yahweh's kingdom was no different than that of Baal's. It is in this morass that God calls messengers to speak against this atrocity and to provide the truth of his coming kingdom.

The Prophets

No group of characters in the Old Testament did more to reveal the nature of the Kingdom of God, and are more misunderstood, than the prophets. Some see them only as dark doomsayers, others as social critics on par with Marx, while still others only grasp onto the many messianic promises that are interspersed throughout their writings. But all these views are too narrow. We do the prophets injustice if we merely regard them as social critics or advocates of the “civil rights” of the poor. We miss God’s larger plan if we focus too closely on the destruction they foretell. We short circuit God’s judgment to cling only to the messianic promises. No, the prophets real concern was to uphold the will and ways of Yahweh as expressed in the covenants (Glasser 1989:90).

In their roles as messengers of Yahweh’s will, prophets come onto the scene in many manners and situations. Regardless, their messages are clear and direct. What is going on in the nations they visit is wrong (see the above history of Israel), and it must end now! The actions of God’s chosen people inaccurately represent the character of Yahweh and his kingdom. But their message is not just for the nations of Yahweh. What God desires is a world that exhibits his ways, and the nations who oppose his will and ways are held accountable. Their message of judgment promises certain doom if changes do not occur. While this is not the focus of my discussion of the kingdom, it is important to note that these assurances of doom are fulfilled in the histories of nations, as evidenced by archeological evidence from Mesopotamia to Egypt.

In closing, many of the prophets provide a future hope, and this is where they reveal the character of Yahweh’s kingdom. The prophets reveal this through various motifs, but two exemplary ones are the messianic promises and the Day of the Lord promises.

The Messiah Reveals the Kingdom’s Origins and Nature

A Christian often reads the prophets and is fixated by the attention that the prophets of Yahweh paid to the coming Messiah. But to focus on the Jesus that the reader understands (admittedly always shortsighted and limited by personal experience), is to short circuit the type of Messiah God was going to bring (and has brought), and limits the meaning of the Kingdom of God to what is currently seen and expected. The task today, as it was for Jesus’ 1st century Jewish compatriots, is to discover what Yahweh intends when he speaks

of Messiah. The fact is the Old Testament bears witness to a living God, one who will add greater deeds to his already great works. God will not rest until his will is fulfilled completely; this is its messianic element (Glasser 1989:119).

There are three primary groupings of messianic prophecy connected with an understanding of the Kingdom of God. The first of these is the promise of lineage back to David. This promise may seem to be unconnected to a greater understanding of the kingdom, but what this does do is connect the messiah back to the covenants of the Old Testament. Yahweh is the one who initiates the covenant with David regarding the perpetuity of his line (2 Sam 7:14-16; 23:5). This covenant is used at the darkest hours of Judah's history to provide hope and promises that Yahweh is indeed in command (Jeremiah 23:5,6;30:8-9; Ezekiel 34:24;37:24,25). But what does this mean for the kingdom? First, it reiterates that Yahweh will move in history, in reality and not in a "spiritual" manner that leaves the day by day lives of individuals unaffected. The kingdom that will become so closely associated with Yahweh's anointed one will indeed intersect the lives of those who belong to that kingdom. Second, the connection to the earlier covenant and to Israel proper means that the Messiah is going stand in line with the revealed nature of God. No one should expect the Messiah to usher in an age of deceit, idolatry, greed, and social stratification (although apparently that was the thinking of many before the Assyrian and Babylonian armies came). Third, the connection back to David was one that personified the victories of Israel—the enemies of God destroyed and the faithfulness of the people to Yahweh. This is indeed to be a sign of God's kingdom, but the prophets do not stop there. They include blessings on the nations (Isaiah 9:1-7;11:1-5 Micah 5:2-4), which while in line with the covenant of Abraham (Genesis 12:1-3), is in contrast to the life of David. The preeminent task of the Messiah is to reveal Yahweh to the nations, a task with which the nation of Israel and its kings were originally entrusted. The Messiah's Davidic connection is not merely to provide a lineage for the coming anointed one, but to use history and the previous revelations to increase the understanding of his chosen one and kingdom.

The second messianic element of importance to the kingdom is the Messiah as "Son of Man." This is the element that Daniel provides during his sojourn in Babylon. In 2:44-45 he states that a new kingdom

will come, a kingdom that is attributable to the God of heaven. Beginning in Chapter 7 he reveals that the “Son of Man” would be the one who ushers in the everlasting kingdom (Glasser 1989:120):

To him was given dominion and glory and kingdom, that all peoples, nations, and languages should serve him; his dominion is an everlasting dominion which shall not pass away, and his kingdom one shall not be destroyed (Daniel 7:14).

The “Son of Man” reveals that it is God who will initiate and keep this new kingdom. The “Son of Man” quotes also reveal a worldwide kingdom, one not of force but of extension of the original mandate given to the people of Israel - to be kings and priests. Further, Daniel reveals that this kingdom will be “given to the people of the saints of the Most High” (Daniel 7:22,27). Once again the prophets have stressed the preeminent role of God in the establishment of the kingdom. It is God, acting through the heavenly “Son of Man,” who will initiate and rule this new kingdom. This new kingdom will indeed be like no other, with full participation by all nations, and with the active role of God’s people.

The third element provided by the prophets is the Suffering Servant. This theme is provided by the different images and songs of the book of Isaiah. Yahweh’s kingdom will come; that is something that the other prophets and Isaiah have made very clear. Yet the kingdom will be inaugurated and extended not through victory as the Israelites have come to see it, but rather through sacrifice, pain, and humility. The victory will be one of redemption, extending the efficacy of the Servant’s suffering to all those who realize and confess that they deserved what he vicariously endured on their behalf (Isaiah 53:4-12). Suffering and redemption are major tenets of the true messianic kingdom; without them there can be no victory. His redemptive work and his worldwide victory will not only cost suffering as every battle costs casualties; it cannot be accomplished except by means of suffering (Bright 1981:152).

Isaiah’s development of the Servant element within the messianic stream appears to be at cross-purposes with the initial two. If God is going to bring victory, and this victory will occur within history and by his power, then why the necessity of the Suffering Servant? In reality, these three different elements help to define each other and add to the greater understanding of the Kingdom of God. The Son of David refocuses the faithful on history and on the covenants with God. Those covenants reveal the righteousness of the Yahweh’s character and kingdom and the ethnic inclusiveness of God’s hope. They also reveal the cost

and destructiveness of sin. For the kingdom to come redemption must first take place. For redemption to occur suffering is a prerequisite. The Son of Man reveals the heavenly nature of both the kingdom and its initiator. The Kingdom of God remains available only through the person and power of God. Yet the true people of God are called to be active participants of the establishment of this kingdom. Rather than think that this establishment will be a bloodless coup against the rulers of the present kingdom, the Servant reminds all that suffering and sacrifice are the ways that God moves in history. These three messianic elements work together to keep the people of Yahweh focused on his kingdom, and not their own concept. The kingdom will come, and it is by the power of God. Yet Isaiah reminds us that the people of God and the kingdom will come to triumph and eschatological fullness by sacrifice.

The Day of the Lord

More than just an eschatological concept, the Day of the Lord became a symbol of hope and fear to the people of Israel and Judah. The prophets who spoke of this were revealing what the inbreaking of Yahweh's kingdom was going to be like for both those who placed hope in Yahweh's rule, and those who actively rebelled against it.

The numerous elements of doom and destruction given throughout the prophets is not done without a lengthy list of premeditated violations by the nations, which causes are usually tied to violations of the Covenant Code given to Israel as part of her national identity. Many of those violations have already been outlined above. Also, as mentioned before, the wrath that God has is not limited to the nation of Israel. Since God's Covenant Code reflects the character of his coming kingdom, all nations are to abide by the basic moral underpinnings of that code. In Amos chapters 1 and 2 (also in Nahum 1, Jonah 1:2) the prophet spells out coming doom for the nations that surround Judah and Israel. He lists their crimes including brutalizing pregnant women, slave selling, lack of compassion, and denying justice to the oppressed. Amos then spends the remaining chapters dealing almost exclusively with the northern kingdom, and he does so by use of the Day of the Lord imagery. The images the prophet from Tekoa uses are violent ones that focus on both the totality of destruction and the promise of a small surviving remnant. What do these brutal visions reveal about the character of the kingdom? The presence of reckoning, where those who have abused, enslaved, and

perverted justice is vital to a proper understanding of the kingdom. Those who have rebelled against God will not simply have no place at the banquet table, they will be forcibly removed. The presence of peace (*shalom*) means that there must be the presence of justice. These dramatic images (and similar ones like Isaiah 2:6-22, Zephaniah 1:2-3,1:14-2:3) of the day of reckoning for Israel and the other nations reminds us that the kingdom will be woe to those whose ideas and hopes are not kingdom oriented. It is also an important reminder that many who look forward to the Day of the Lord will find that they are the oppressors and not the oppressed (Amos 5:16-20). This stands as a powerful warning to mission theology that either allows or facilitates continued crimes against the character of the kingdom. For those people the Day of the Lord will be like night and the punishment inescapable (Isaiah 2:6-3:9; Amos 6:8-11;9:7-10).

The prophet Zephaniah gives as strong a warning as any of the prophets of the brutality that the Day of the Lord will be for some. But he holds out hope in 2:3. The prophet reminds his listeners and readers that those who seek the Lord and his righteousness, and seek him with humility are offered shelter from the reckoning that will be occurring on that day. The other prophets also include such offers and promises of hope for those who turn to Yahweh (Micah 4:6-8;6:8; Zephaniah 2:3). Although the Day of the Lord shall be a fierce one, it is also clear that repentance is a characteristic of the coming kingdom.

The Day of the Lord is also the promise of the coming presence of the Lord. Peter's quote of Joel 2 gives a partial indication of what this coming presence of the Lord will mean. Peter quotes Joel without the surrounding text. The surrounding text makes it clear that the erupting presence of the Lord is tied to the Day of the Lord and the coming of his kingdom. The images of blood in the sky and darkness place the listener/reader in the same time and place as when Amos was prophesying. But in the midst of this day the Lord's Spirit is poured out to all of the followers of Yahweh, regardless of age, status, or gender.

One final image from the Day of the Lord that provides a challenging picture of the Kingdom of God is from the final chapter of Amos. After Amos' vision has seemingly spared no one, he reminds the audience, as all prophets do, that some of the faithful at least will see something else on the great Day of the Lord. While the swath of destruction is wide, so too will be the accompanying blessing. The fallen *sucah* of David will be raised up (perhaps referring to the covenant blessing that Israel was supposed to receive and pass on),

and other nations will bear Yahweh's name. The covenant will come back into place, but this time with Yahweh's desire that all nations be part of it. Amos does not stop at spiritual or ethical blessing, though. The images in verses 13-15 show that the kingdom will have immeasurable bounty, provision, and stability. Amos' vision stated unequivocally that the kingdom shall break through into the material elements of life as well as the spiritual and ethical. These images are the same as the often-quoted passages of Isaiah (Isaiah 60-61). The promise of true peace and justice, of the pursuit, not of violence and power, but of joy and service are characteristics of the kingdom as foretold in the Day of the Lord prophecies.

The Day of the Lord prophecies propel the audience closer and closer to penetration of Yahweh's kingdom into this world. The hope of the coming Messiah would be integrated into the larger hope of the day when Yahweh would initiate his kingdom. The people of Israel waited and watched for the coming of that kingdom and the dawning of the Day of the Lord. From exile in Mesopotamia they received word that they could return home, and many surely looked at Sheshbazzar and Zerubbabel and wondered if they might be the anointed ones. Disappointment followed disappointment until the day when a young man unrolled the scroll of Isaiah in a Galilean synagogue and read that the words of Isaiah had been fulfilled.

The New Testament and the Kingdom

The Old Testament revealed God's actions in history and his promises of a new kingdom to come. The New Testament continues to develop the picture of God's movements in the world of humanity, only now the promise of the kingdom will become the reality of the kingdom. From almost the very outset of his active ministry Jesus informs the people that the Kingdom of God is in their midst, it is close, it is present. Jesus came to make the kingdom a reality in the lives of the people of God—not just an ethnic, nationalistic, or cultic people of God, but a kingdom of people who received the salvation he would offer. The life of Jesus reveals much about the character of that kingdom, as both the announcer and means of the coming of that kingdom.

The life of Jesus provides both glimpses and full paintings of God's kingdom as it breaks into the kingdoms of this earth. His words, especially in parables, but also in lengthier dialogues, provide important insight into the character of a never before experienced kingdom. Those words will shock and dismay many of the audiences who hear them, the listeners having already decided the make-up and quality of the Kingdom of God. His actions will likewise shock the viewers by challenging the very notions of membership and constitution of the kingdom. Reviewing these words and actions is vital to understanding what Yahweh means by Kingdom of God.

Parables, Speeches, and Responses

The number of Jesus' words that dealt with the Kingdom of God are numerous enough to provide material for many books. While it is impossible to review all the pertinent information in the space available, representative samples help to build an understanding of the kingdom Jesus was here to make reality.

Jesus Announces His Coming/God's Reign- In Luke 4:14-30 Jesus returns from the desert experience with the devil and enters his home town. It is here that Jesus proclaims that God's kingdom has come. For many Evangelicals any notion of the kingdom is tied to Christ's death and resurrection, that only at that time can the kingdom be rightly seen as beginning. But this is not what Jesus sees. It is the coming of the Anointed One, the Messiah, that inaugurates the year of the Lord's favor, the Day of the Lord, the beginning of the kingdom (Ridderbos 1962: 96)—for Jesus is the kingdom (Arias 1984:69).

Jesus turns to what may have been one of the leading passages of hope for the Jews living under the Roman occupation, Isaiah 61:1-2. The promise of the good news being preached to the poor, freedom for the captives, recovery of sight for the blind, release of the oppressed were all messianic and eschatological hopes that produced longing in the hearts of the citizens of the promised land. But the passage in Isaiah does not stop at the proclaiming of the year of the Lord's favor. Isaiah speaks of the day of vengeance by the Lord. That day of vengeance, a day that the Jews hoped would mean the destruction of the Roman empire, was not part of what Jesus said "is fulfilled in their hearing" (Luke 4:21). Quite unexpectedly, he then refers to two Old Testament stories that speak of healing, blessing, and redemption of aliens and non-Jews. This infuriated the crowds, whose theology of the kingdom was one of the raising of ethnic Judaism and the defeat of all

other powers. Jesus, however, is talking of another kingdom. This kingdom will be even more than what they had hoped for. The kingdom that is fulfilled in Jesus' coming means healing, redemption, liberation, and the defeating not of just human powers, but of all the powers that oppose the reign of God. The captives to be freed are not just ethnic Jews languishing under Gentile power, but all peoples under the control of God's opposition.

The placement of this scene after the temptation allows Luke to further illustrate this. Jesus in the desert has been offered the devil's power over all the things of which the passage in Isaiah speaks—hunger, pain, and poverty, riches, and ruling power. Jesus triumphs over the devil to symbolize the coming of the kingdom, and to demonstrate that God does intend to remove the devil's sovereignty over the very things that he offers to Jesus. Luke follows the synagogue scene with evidence by power of the truth of Jesus' proclamation—casting out of demons, and several healing stories. These miracles reveal that the Kingdom of God is redemption from all evil and the restoration of the whole of life (Ridderbos 1962:68). In vs. 43 Jesus states that his mission is to continue what occurred in the synagogue in Nazareth—"I must preach the good news of the Kingdom of God to the other towns also, because that is why I was sent." Luke does not record any "proclamations" or "preaching" in any of this chapter, only the actions described above. Jesus' actions were the proclamation of the Kingdom of God. This was his gospel (Arias 1984:3).

One of the evils that Jesus, especially in Luke's gospel, opposes is poverty. Luke's gospel has become the gospel of reference for many Liberation theologians, with his repetitious mentioning of the poor as those who have a special place in God's heart. Luke chooses the term "poor" in his account of the Sermon on the Mount as opposed to Matthew's "poor in spirit," and emphasizes the poor against the rich in many of the parables and stories he includes. Clearly, Jesus in Luke's account is one who opposes poverty. While not canonizing any group of people, it is clear, says Julio de Santa Ana, that "poverty is an evil and therefore incompatible with the Kingdom of God, which has come... into history and embraces the totality of human existence" (Glasser 1989:198). The coming of the kingdom is to provide a tangible manifestation of God's attitude toward poverty and injustice. The people of God, those who are citizens of this new kingdom, cannot sit idly by while these powers go unopposed and unchecked. Poverty, and its enabling partner, injustice, are

agents that stand in opposition to the Kingdom of God. Therefore God's kingdom and people must grapple with the injustice that brings exploitation and poverty, and they must be particularly concerned to help the poor and suffering (Glasser 1989:198).

The Lost Parables- Luke 15

Jesus never defines what the Kingdom of God is, but, he reveals some of the essentials to understanding the kingdom in his parables. Luke 15 includes three such parables. In the first two parables Jesus tells the audience that the kingdom is where there is great rejoicing over finding those things that are lost. Indeed, even though there are seemingly many other identical objects that are not lost, the finding of the one that was lost creates joy in the household of the master. The third parable uses the lost image in a more personal manner, with the lost son returning home to be welcomed by the expectant and worried father. What sort of kingdom is Jesus revealing? It is not the old order patriarchy with a stern and detached father figure. Jesus, who revolutionized the existing revelation of God's name as Father (Arias 1984:18), reveals a kingdom of love, the kingdom of that Father. Mortimer Arias sums up the character of the kingdom revealed in Luke 15 by referring to God's motherly tenderness, fatherly authority, and long-suffering parenthood (Arias 1984:17).

These parables emphasize the love of God, not an unheard of element of God's personality, but one that is newly redefined. God's love means that the Kingdom of God will be one that comes by grace and is personified by grace. This grace means celebration over the return of a lost sheep, the welcoming back of the son who has disgraced the family name. Grace levels the playing field for all those who repent and receive Jesus' offer of forgiveness (Arias 1984:20). Those who have not sought righteousness all their days (the prodigal son) are as welcome and as honored as those who did (the elder brother). Jesus picks up this theme in other parables as well (Matthew 20:1-15; Luke 7:41-43). This chapter begins with the Pharisees and teachers of the law muttering about the company Jesus keeps. What they have failed to realize is that their understanding of God and his kingdom was limited by their own diligence to the law. They failed to see God's love and his offer of grace as essential characteristics of the kingdom.

Sheep and Goats: A Big Surprise- Matthew 25:31-46

In an earlier conversation with a young lawyer Jesus elucidated the greatest commandments: to love God with all your being, and to love your neighbor as yourself (Luke 10:27). In Matthew 25:31-46 Jesus demonstrates how important that passage is to properly understanding the kingdom. In this passage he separates the true followers of God (the sheep) from the false (goats) not by confessions (Lord, Lord) or even dogma, but by simple obedience to the commandment to love their neighbor. He reveals that by loving even our “least” neighbor we are loving **him**, introducing the sacrament of neighbor (Arias 1984:112). The role and importance of this passage is really two-fold in adding to the understanding of the Kingdom of God. First, obedience is essential within the Kingdom of God. This obedience does not create a salvation by works (Ridderbos 1962:221), but rather it is seen as the condition and preparation for entry into the Kingdom of God (Ridderbos 1962:245). Second, this passage makes it clear that the love of brother, regardless of human position and privilege, is indelibly connected to the love of God. Mortimer Arias summarizes this connection by focusing on the meaning of Jesus’ call to turn to the Kingdom of God:

...Jesus’ call is personal but not individualistic or privatistic. To turn to Christ is to turn to the kingdom, to turn to others... In the New Testament there is no hot line to God that is not connected through the neighbor. To love God and the neighbor are the first and second commandments. There can be no vertical reconciliation with God (offering at the altar) unless you make horizontal reconciliation with your brother who may have something against you (Matt 5:24). Nor can your sins be forgiven by the Father if you do not forgive those who sin against you (Matt 6:12,14-15; 18:21-35). To receive a “little one” is to receive Christ himself, and to serve “one of the least of these” is the only way to serve the king before inheriting the eternal kingdom (Matthew 18:1-3; 25:31-46)... Conversion to Christ means conversion to neighbor (Arias 1984: 112).

Jesus is the one who links the horizontal nature of the kingdom with the vertical, and in so doing reveals that love of and responsibility to neighbor are essential characteristics of the Kingdom of God. The kingdom that these characteristics reveal is one that will bring a joy that Jesus illustrates on earth.

Wedding at Cana- John 2:1-10

One of the biggest failings of the church in America today is the failure to grasp the importance of joy and celebration. Jesus’ presence at the wedding feast of Cana should not be ignored and is not alone

demonstrating that the kingdom is one of joy and celebration. In the midst of a limited three-year earthly ministry Jesus joins a wedding celebration, one to which he takes his disciples. Here he celebrates and plays a major role in supplying the wine necessary for the festivities. Joy and celebration are essential elements of the kingdom. In the earlier mentioned “Lost” parables the finder is always depicted as one experiencing joy, and the feast that the father throws for his wayward son is one of great mirth. The church and its messengers of the kingdom have, especially in Evangelical circles, been associated with many emotions, but far too rarely have they been associated with joy. This joy is not baseless, but is centered upon the arrival of the kingdom in the person of Christ. He, as the bridegroom, is cause for celebration. His death will be cause for fasting (Mark 2:20), but his coming and presence is not time for solemnity. He is the center and cause of the joy, the bliss, which began with his coming (Ridderbos 1962:51).

Zacchaeus and meals with sinners- Luke 19:1-10

The story of Zacchaeus’ conversion and of Jesus’ dining with him reveals additional kingdom attributes. Zacchaeus’ story is placed shortly after the rich young ruler’s request for eternal life. The ruler, a young man who has zeal for the commandments of God, is sent away saddened by Jesus’ request that he sell all he has and give it to the poor. In contrast, Zacchaeus has not been keeping the commandments of God; he has clearly stolen from his fellow citizens. Zacchaeus might even have as much wealth as the young ruler. Jesus’ call to him and desire to enter into his house converts Zacchaeus to the kingdom. “Look, Lord! Here and now I give half of all my possessions to the poor, and if I have cheated anybody out of anything, I will pay him back four times the amount.” Jesus said to him, “Today salvation has come to this house, because this man, too, is a son of Abraham” (Luke 19:8-9). Jesus did not respond with the challenge to give **all** of his possessions to the poor; he accepted Zacchaeus’ response to the true nature of the kingdom in terms of righting economic, societal, and neighbor relationships. Conversion to the kingdom, therefore, is not merely a change in religious feelings and a transaction in our souls, but a turning toward the kingdom in Jesus Christ and to our neighbor in service (Arias 1984:50). Jesus’ response to Zacchaeus’ conversion makes it clear that the personal and social are inseparable, and help to define each other. Jim Wallis captures this idea:

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 (Arias 1984:50).

Zacchaeus' conversion demonstrates that the Kingdom of God has implications in this world. This is crucial to an understanding of the kingdom and for evaluating the success of missions and the foundations of missions theology. Conversions without impact on societal realities are conversions without the force of the kingdom.

Jesus enters Zacchaeus' house as a guest, just as he has done numerous times before with other sinners and social undesirables. Repeatedly, Jesus dines with those who are least appropriate in the minds of the religious thinkers of the day. His actions reaffirm the earlier kingdom characteristic of grace. But this grace is not a grace that leaves the diners unchanged. His eating and drinking were proclamations of these sinners' membership into the kingdom by grace. They were now citizens of that kingdom, and that citizenship means liberation from the "powers that be" in the world. What that liberation looks like is not clear, nor is it uniform. It is doubtful that Zacchaeus was invited into the inner circle at the synagogue. The sinners and publicans with whom Jesus dined still were under the control of the two parties (Jewish elite and the Romans) who would execute this Great Liberator. But the reality was that the "powers that be" were no longer in charge, even if their power was only beginning to recede. Jesus' ministry and the kingdom he established stands powerfully against the powers of this world. The Kingdom of God is characterized by liberating power. This liberation is tied to repentance, as the individual is freed from the power of sin and obedience to powers that act as faulty icons of the true God and his kingdom. Again Arias summarizes:

The kingdom is an iconoclastic disturber of religious sacred places, and customs, and the most radical threat to temple alters, priestly castes, and the most protected "holiest of holies." The kingdom is the appointed challenger of all sacralizing myths and systems and relentless unmasker of all human disguises, self-righteous ideologies, or self-perpetuating powers (Arias 1984:47).

The Miracles- Matthew 8:23-27; 9:1-8; Mark 1:21-45;7:31-35; Luke 4:38-41;5:17-26; John 6:1-15; 11:1-16 (and more)

The liberating power of Jesus did not stop merely in opposing the earthly powers that opposed him. Jesus' ministry is perhaps best remembered for the many healing stories and exorcisms he performed. Jesus'

miracles dot the landscape in each of the gospels, and serve the kingdom in several ways. First, they provide proof that the Kingdom of God is present. Jesus' miracles are clearly proof that he is doing things by the power of God and the kingdom (Matthew 8:23-27; Mark 2:1-12; Luke 4:31-37; John 11:1-16). Today mission magazines are filled with stories of "power encounters" where the power of God provides proof to those who experience these acts that Yahweh God is indeed more powerful than the gods they worship. But these acts of power became at times an impediment to Jesus' work. Rather than focusing on the Kingdom of God and its righteousness/justice, people sought the power that Jesus (and later his followers) demonstrated. The signs of the kingdom became for the audience more important than the kingdom itself (Mark 1:45; John 6:26).

Jesus also performed miracles to challenge pre-established ideologies (Mark 1:40-42; 5:25-36; John 9:1-12). As stated above regarding the liberating power of Jesus and the kingdom's confrontation with the earthly power of self-importance, Jesus' actions were reverberating blows against the small-minded ideas of the ruling elite. God's kingdom is one that is *for* humanity, and as such, concepts like Sabbath observance or uncleanness should never interfere with Yahweh's desires to heal humanity.

The miracles of Jesus also vociferously proclaim the kingdom's reality. The gospel of Mark opens with the statement, "The beginning of the gospel of Jesus Christ, the Son of God" (Mark 1:1). Mark's gospel is filled with repeated act of healing, exorcisms, and miracles. These miracles are part of the proclamation that, "The time has come. The Kingdom of God is near. Repent and believe the good news!" The miracles act as revelations of the Kingdom of God and call for decisions—to be for or against the King and victor Jesus Christ (Ridderbos 1962:70).

But these healings are also elements of the kingdom. The Kingdom of God is a kingdom of wholeness and life. The kingdom affirms all of human life—physical, psychological, spiritual, social, eternal—by defending it, restoring it, and celebrating it (Arias 1984:23; Bosch 1991:399). It is, I believe, important to note that often the healing occurs with no recorded preaching or overtly spiritually oriented messages (Mark 1:29-34; 5:25-30; Luke 7:11-15; 13:10-13). Jesus delights in healing to show the character

of the kingdom that he likewise preaches. Jesus' first step in introducing people to the Kingdom of God is not always one of audible proclamation, but rather the inbreaking of physical kingdom reality.

The Sermon on the Mount-Matthew 5:1-7:29; Luke 6:17-49

The great Sermon on the Mount and its rigorous ethics have long been associated with kingdom thinking. The severity of the challenge often causes Christians to find ways around the clear meaning of the words Jesus spoke (Bosch 1991:69). But what Jesus says provides additional insight into the make-up of the kingdom. The Sermon should be considered as a proclamation of kingdom values and kingdom life style for those responsible as guardians of the keys (Glasser 1989:192).

The Sermon on the Mount has sundry elements of the Kingdom of God within it, many of which have been touched upon with earlier references to Jesus' life and ministry. Although the entire sermon reveals the traits of the kingdom, the Beatitudes (Matthew 5:3-12; Luke 6:20-22) and the call for love and not vengeance (Matthew 5:38-48; Luke 6:27-36) will shed additional light on kingdom conditions.

The Beatitudes speak to the inner world of the heart of God's people (Glasser 1989:193). If one desires true happiness and true blessedness, then one must assume the character of the kingdom. The list of characteristics—those who are poor (in spirit), who mourn, who are meek, who hunger and seek righteousness/justice, who are merciful, who are pure in heart, who are peacemakers—suggests individuals who do not allow themselves to sit on the sidelines of the moral and ethical issues of the day. They must interact with their world. But their interaction does not flow from personal power or position, but from hearts that are connected and contented with the Lord's kingdom. Their opposition to the forces of evil will not bring great earthly position; no, it bring the same treatment that Yahweh's prophets received in days of old. Those whose hearts are fixed and linked on Yahweh and his kingdom will be fulfilled and blessed in their actions and struggles for the kingdom. True happiness comes not merely from relationship with God, but from a relationship with God that permeates the reality of a Christian's life and makes them willing proponents of kingdom realities.

Growing out of the heart conditions listed in the Beatitudes is the response to injury and opposition. I have heard many arguments on how the "turn the other cheek passage" can be dealt with (including an

argument based on the right-handedness of most Israelites during Jesus' day). Any attempt to avoid the responsibility of Matthew 5:38-48 will fall short. Jesus opens the teaching talking about the rights of Israelites to respond to harm by a subsequent act of vengeance. But now Jesus issues a call not to vengeance, but to restraint. While the people of God are to oppose evil, they are called to oppose it not with acts of violence and evil, but with acts of mercy and servanthood. Jesus follows this up with the call to love our enemies, love and not hate. Responding with mercy and out of love is done "that you may be children of your Father in heaven." To oppose evil with good, to love rather than hate is to live within the character of the kingdom. These characteristics mark a kingdom alien to the world in which Jesus lived, but one he established with his coming, living, and dying. David Bosch summarizes the peace instead of vengeance concept found throughout the Sermon:

The Sermon on the Mount is eminently political since it challenges almost every traditional social structure. His politics was, however, one of peace-making, of reconciliation, of justice, of refusing vengeance, and above all, of love of enemy... His supreme "work" of selfless love was, of course, his dying on the cross. Without this, the instructions on the Mount remains an eloquent but hollow sermon (Bosch 1991:70).

The reality of Jesus' life states that the kingdom characteristics found in the Sermon on the Mount and throughout his speeches and ministry are not optional, but rather are simple truths with which anyone desiring the Kingdom of God must live.

The Kingdom in the Rest of the New Testament

The remainder of the New Testament is not focused on defining the Kingdom of God. The great mystery of God, that Christ has come, Christ is risen, and Christ will come again, is now at the forefront of the writers' minds. The kingdom is no longer expectant; it has entered human history and human existence. Now the followers of Jesus await his return and the final battle of good and evil—a battle to whose outcome they are now privy. The remainder of the New Testament does, however, have four passages that are helpful to better understanding the kingdom.

Jesus' Ascension and the Kingdom-Acts 1:6

Luke's record of Jesus' return to the Father has the key question by the disciples (Acts 1:6), "Lord, are you at this time going to restore the kingdom of Israel?" Their question at first seems misguided, since Jesus has been clear that his kingdom is not an ethnic kingdom, a kingdom of Israelites. In fact, it is the question that Christians still ask today when they read of violence, wars, and desperate circumstances all around the world. The kingdom for God's people, of the true Israel as Paul will later refer to all the faithful, is not yet the full reality. Even the most optimistic reader of prophecy has to admit that the fullness of Amos 9:11-15 and other such passages has not come. Jesus reigns, but it seems that the powers of the world have not heard about it.

Indeed, the question of the presence of the kingdom is essential to understanding how Christians are to work, pray, hope, and do missions. The great mystery of the kingdom is that it is a present reality and a future hope. It returned to earth after the fall in the person of Jesus Christ, yet it awaits his return to gain sovereignty over the whole of the universe. He is king, but the rebellion has not been entirely snuffed out. That is the difficulty for Christians, but it is both a warning and an inspiration to hope.

The warning comes from the history of God's people. The children of Israel did not leave Egypt by their own power. The nations of Israel and Judah could not have survived for the centuries they did except for the power of God. The fact that the kingdom has not yet covered the whole of creation means that the children of that kingdom must continue to work within the power of God, and place control and expectation in his hands. We are incapable of making the earth the new heaven and residence of the kingdom. The danger of thinking otherwise is to place too much confidence in the machinations of humanity, in our utopian plans. Until the time occurs to which Jesus refers in Matthew 24:14, the kingdom will not have achieved a universal reality. To remember that is to keep a focus on the kingdom and not on the progress of humanity.

At the same time the future orientation of the kingdom inspires hope. No better prayer of hope I believe exists than the Lord's prayer found in Matthew 6:9-13. *Our Father in heaven*- the opening places emphasis on the one by whom the kingdom will become fully realized. *Hallowed by your name* - the essential overriding quality of the kingdom is God's holiness. *Your kingdom come*- this is the prayer, and this

is the hope, that Yahweh Father God will bring about his kingdom. *Your will be done on earth as it is in heaven*- the hope is that the kingdom of heaven will be on earth, that the perfect will of God (which is the kingdom) would be played out on earth. These opening verses of the Lord's prayer bring hope to the weary worker. In praying for the coming of that kingdom we pray for a redeemed, healed, amended creation (Arias 1984:31).

While the kingdom is not yet fully in power, there is a present reality to it. The people of God have the obligation to be heralds of the kingdom and establish beachheads of kingdom territory in a fallen world that Christ came and died for. Norman Perrin summarizes the interaction between present hope and future realization:

The hotly debated question as to whether this implies that the kingdom is to be regarded as present, inbreaking, dawning, casting its shadows before it, or whatever, becomes academic when we realize that the claim of the saying is that certain events in the ministry of Jesus are nothing less than *an experience* of the Kingdom of God (Arias 1984:16).

The First Church Meeting- Acts 2:38-47

Peter addresses the great multitude who have gathered on the day of Pentecost. His message affirms the truth of who Jesus was, what his death meant, and the truth of the resurrection. What happens in verses 38 to 47 provides a glimpse into what the disciples had learned about the kingdom. First, in verse 38 the kingdom is very much about forgiveness of sins and repentance. The importance of forgiveness of sins and repentance cannot be overestimated, for they are at the core of God's kingdom, of the liberation that comes from God. Indeed, without forgiveness life is not life, and this world may go to its final annihilation. Forgiveness is the door of entrance to the Kingdom of God (Arias 1984:75).

About 3000 accept the message of forgiveness and repentance, and when they do they are ushered into the new family of God. People are devoted to one another; there is sharing of meals, and prayer (2:42). There is a centrality of belief and faith that is confirmed by the many miracles (2:43). The community works together to provide for the common needs, understanding that poverty and hunger were not consistent with the Kingdom of God (2:44-46). Finally, they gave credit and honor to God, the author of the kingdom, and in so doing brought others into the kingdom fellowship (2:45). While the Acts 2 church does not provide

explicit details of what the disciples had gleaned from Jesus' teachings of the kingdom, it does provide a look into what they saw as the basics of the kingdom.

Fruits of the Spirit- Galatians 5:22-23

This well-known passage acts to confirm much of the Beatitudes and illustrate the implications of the kingdom on everyday life. A Kingdom person is one who is a new creature (2 Corinthians. 5:17), and, as such, their lives should no longer marked by their former ways. Paul provides first a list of behaviors that are clearly in opposition to the kingdom. Then he provides the internal qualities that brand a person as having the present reality of God's presence and love, and the future hope of his rule and reign: love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control. Against such there is no law, because these are the correct responses to the kingdom. Conversion to the kingdom will mean an internal change of environment.

The External Change of Environment- James 2

As much as the Fruits of the Spirit speak of a change of internal constitution, those internal changes are to coincide with external behavior changes. Much as Jesus did in Matthew 25, James in chapter 2 vetoes behavior that changes the order of the kingdom of heaven. James chastises the discriminatory treatment towards rich and poor alike. James' understanding of the kingdom is one where love of neighbor outweighs any notion of human power and position.

Then in the final 12 verses he challenges any notion of faith that does not have implications in present reality and history. Faith without impact in this present age is faith in a kingdom other than the Kingdom of God. Believing in God and his kingdom are never enough—and to preach such is to introduce people to an icon of God, but not the real ruler of the kingdom. Salvation is the free gift of God, but we must never mistake the freeness of the gift for a hollow, undemanding kingdom. The value of the kingdom is precisely what makes it so worth finding and holding onto (Luke 15), and James is quite clear that belief in an ethereal, otherworldly faith is not something in which to place trust.

The Meaning of the Kingdom

The preceding review of scriptural evidence for the kingdom is by no means a complete one. The Kingdom of God is the unifying principles of the entire Bible, and, as such, it underlies and flows through every passage. The passages chosen above provide just an example of the many passages that deal more directly with the subject of the Kingdom of God. Based on the body of scripture mentioned above, what is meant by the Kingdom of God as an evaluative concept for mission practice and theology?

The best way to summarize the Kingdom of God for this purpose is to focus first on what salvation means in the Kingdom of God. Kingdom salvation is a holistic change in the lives of people who have entered it. As such, breaking apart the different components is difficult and can lead to the separation of the elements and the elevation of certain ingredients over others (Bosch 1991:405). Understanding this, the breakdown of the following concepts is meant to develop the comprehensive picture necessary to understand biblical salvation based on the Kingdom of God.

Forgiveness of sin and repentance

One of the hallmarks of kingdom salvation has been and should continue to be forgiveness of sins and repentance from the behavior and desire to sin. Even as I have attempted to refocus attention on the other components of salvation, this one keeps surfacing. The cultic religion revealed to Moses and Israel in the desert was meant to impress the depth and cost of sin. The history of Israel provided throughout the Old Testament is filled with sin and its consequences. The forgiveness of sin was always the desire of Yahweh, as a element of salvation to the Kingdom of God. Sin is rebellion against God and against his kingdom and defies his desires for the world. The message of repentance is closely tied to forgiveness. Certainly in the Old Testament repentance, not doom, is the goal of the speeches given by most of the prophets.

Jesus called out to the world, offering the forgiveness of sins, meeting and healing the broken, and giving the strong warning to go and sin no more. The healings of Mark 2:1-12 and John 9 provide wonderful examples of God offering forgiveness and seeking repentance in people. Jesus, as initiator of the kingdom, understands that the kingdom is openly opposed by sin. Paul Jon Sobrino captures this idea:

Jesus' attitude toward sin is of fundamental importance if we wish to understand the relationship between the historical Jesus and the Kingdom of God. First of all, his preaching of the good news takes place in the context of a sinful world. Structurally speaking then, the goodness must be seen not simply as liberty, but as liberation... Overcoming sin becomes the criterion for verifying whether one has accepted the good news or not... And the point worth noting is that sin is not seen simply as saying no to God, but no to the Kingdom of God (Arias 1984:65).

Any kingdom salvation that does not offer forgiveness of sin and true repentance is to enter a kingdom other than the Kingdom of God. In other words, filling out acceptance cards and raising of hands are not enough to call one a member of the kingdom. Additionally, any view of kingdom liberation that does not free the captive from the bondage of sin, is merely loosening some but not all the chains of death and sorrow. Living life in light of forgiveness and repentance is certainly a key component of kingdom salvation.

Relationship to Others

As seen in the scriptural review of the Kingdom of God, relationship to others is a recurring theme. From the Covenant Code in the Pentateuch, to the warnings of the prophets, to the Sermon on the Mount, through Paul and finally to James, the idea is that being saved to the kingdom means relationships must change. We are challenged to see every living soul as special to God. The understanding that God is for humanity means that salvation must include corresponding activity. All citizens of this earth are to receive respect and honor, and all ought to receive the grace of God. Salvation to the kingdom means restoring grace to all human relationships. The story of Zacchaeus has Jesus' own stamp of approval, as Zacchaeus rehabilitates his relationships with the poor and his neighbors.

Salvation joyfully to every home

The repeated message of Old Testament and of the New Testament is that the promise of the good news of the kingdom and its salvation is not for any one group alone. The Kingdom of God is not the property of any ethnic, economic, or societal group. The Kingdom of God does not come in one city, nor does the worship that takes place occur in any one place. It has been offered to all people, and, if they are willing to accept it, is realized in every place on earth. Further, the kingdom is to come with joy and excitement. What was found is no longer lost, the children have been invited into the kingdom of their Father. While this not may seem to be a radical thought, the history of missions is loaded with emotions other

than joy. Since the time of Jonah the message that the gospel is even for one's enemies has brought disdain, horror, and rebellion. Kingdom salvation is ultimately the challenger and changer of prejudices and hatred. It crosses all the boundaries we can set up. This is a new kind of kingdom and a new kind of salvation.

Physical Life

The first three elements of kingdom salvation are not necessarily surprising to the Evangelical mind. The concepts of forgiveness, better relationships, and the universality of the gospel have always been preached to greater or lesser degrees as part of the Christian *kerygma*. But physical salvation has a greater role than it is given in a traditional Evangelical understanding of the kingdom. By physical salvation I refer to the kingdom's impact on the elements of life that are not spiritual. The opening quote I had from the missionary in Albania and the message of Donald McGavran are typical of the traditional message shared by Evangelical Christians throughout the world. Those comments though are quite out of line with the idea of the Kingdom of God.

The Kingdom of God is very earthy. Salvation is not salvation out of this world, but always salvation of this world (Bosch 1991:399). Humans are created as a holistic beings- emotional, spiritual, and physical ones whose elements are not disconnected from one another. Humans are not primarily spiritual beings (as the resurrection visions of the spirit and body being reunited demonstrates), but rather a complex organism that functions with all three elements in reliance on one another.

Traditionally different theologies have preached salvation of one of the three elements of humanity by preaching a Jesus of just incarnation, or just earthly life, or just death, or just resurrection, or just *parousia*. All such theologies and all such salvations are counter to the Kingdom of God and its salvation. Salvation is comprehensive, touching all areas of human life, because we worship the *totus Christus*- the totality of his life, and not any one piece. All the Christological elements taken together constitute the praxis of Jesus, the One who both inaugurated salvation and provided us with the model to emulate (Bosch 1991:399).

The good news of the kingdom is a message of peace. The *shalom* of God is the wholeness of God. It is not just the absence of war, but the presence of justice. It is not just vertical relationship with Yahweh, but it is Yahweh's presence, will, and desires flowing into every nook and cranny of this existence. It is

human beings living whole lives, not lives where sin reigns or poverty rules or depression, hopelessness, and sadness have control. Perhaps the greatest difficulty in understanding *shalom* wholeness is that only Jesus has lived it since the fall. The Kingdom of God is meant to be a return to Eden wholeness so that humanity can grow to live, love God and learn to reign with him.

This definition of salvation cannot be put in a tract and handed out to every passer by. It is complex and challenging, as is the kingdom. I will bring more attention to it later on the subject on social concern.

Salvation within this world

While not a tangible component of salvation in the same manner as forgiveness of sins and restoration of relationships, salvation within this world is key to properly understanding the interaction of the Kingdom of God and history. The Covenant Code was intended to be lived out within the life and history of Israel. The traditional argument is that the code is to make it so that others would know about the God of Israel and understand his character. This is certainly true, but the code was meant to be a first-fruit of the inbreaking kingdom. The kingdom was always meant to become reality within the pages of human history. The entire record of God's interaction with humanity is done within the pages of human history except for the final two chapters of Revelation, a book written in a genre that makes it difficult to pinpoint. Perhaps there is a totality of the kingdom which comes after the pages of history are closed, but the expansion and blessing of the coming, establishment, and growth of the kingdom, and, most importantly, salvation occur in this life and on this earth. David Bosch hits perfectly on the importance of this life, especially in light of the next:

Those who know that God will one day wipe away all tears will not accept with resignation the tears of those who suffer and are oppressed *now*. Anyone who knows that one day there will be no more disease can and must actively anticipate the conquest of disease in individuals and society *now*. And anyone who believes that the enemy of God and humans will be vanquished will already oppose him *now* in his machinations in family and society. For all this has to do with *salvation* (Bosch 1991:400).

The gospel of Luke most clearly represents this. Luke talks about salvation as present reality in this life. Further, Luke clearly expands salvation to include this-life elements: economic, social, political, physical, psychological, and spiritual (Bosch 1991:393).

Christian focus has traditionally not been on Luke, but rather Paul and his writings. As noted in the scriptural review, Paul and other New Testament writers have little to say specifically about the kingdom. Paul is far more focused on the eschatological hope of Jesus and the kingdom, but even Paul sees the implications of the kingdom reality on this life (fruits of the Spirit, confrontation with Caesarean claims of divinity, fellowship with lapsing believers, human roles). Certainly Paul's salvation seems more future oriented (Bosch 1991:393), but we must neither remove Paul from the greater body of scripture nor assume that Paul's audience was not already well acquainted with a greater biblical understanding of the kingdom and the history and record of Jesus' actions and words on the subject. Our modern understanding of Paul's writings must not rise to the level of a canon within the canon. Paul, as all the writers of scripture, saw dimly the truths of the kingdom, and our understanding centuries later of what he saw is dimmer still.

An offer of salvation that does not touch this life—the present reality—is not kingdom salvation. This has real consequences for the message that Christians and missionaries in particular give to the world. Salvation out of this world is not the good news that Jesus came preaching.

These four elements of salvation: forgiveness and redemption, relationship to others, physical life, and salvation in and not out of the world, provide powerful grading requirements for any mission theology that seeks to spread biblical faith. Building on these defining aspects of salvation we must consider two additional components of the Kingdom of God that should be used in evaluating the success and faithfulness of missions to the kingdom.

Social Concern

In the section on physical life I have argued that the Kingdom of God is a holistic kingdom that must bring salvation to the whole of human life, not just the spiritual element. The concept of holistic salvation is admittedly complex, and it is difficult to evaluate mission theologies' acceptance or denial of the concept. To help narrow the evaluation the idea of social action, a key element of the Kingdom of God and holistic salvation, can be used to measure the success of mission theologies. Social action also cannot be removed from an understanding of the kingdom. Any attempt to place the call to social action outside of the kingdom will remove it further from salvation, and further from the purvey of missions. A kingdom approach to social

concern would see it as not a tool for “evangelism,” secondary to “vertical relationship,” but as an integrated component of holistic salvation.

Opposition to anti-kingdom powers

Closely aligned with the idea of kingdom salvation is opposition to anti-kingdom powers. Mission theologies must have a kingdom approach to opposing any power that stands in opposition to the *shalom* of God’s kingdom, but must oppose such evil by God’s grace, God’s power, and without vengeance. As Christians, we cannot produce the kingdom, but our mission needs to reflect the kingdom character. The kingdom promises a day of reckoning for all who oppose God’s ways. True kingdom missions must, to a lesser extent, facilitate the process by opposing those forces that will, on the day the kingdom comes in fullness, meet with the reckoning of Yahweh.

Summary

These three measures of the Kingdom of God—kingdom salvation, the role of social concern, and opposition to anti-kingdom powers will provide a starting point to evaluate theologies designed to complete the Great Commission.

Mission Theologies and Kingdom Pre-requisites, How Do They Measure Up?

The ultimate goal in better understanding the Kingdom of God is to ensure that our proclamation of the Good News is in line with truth of the kingdom. For the Christian, and especially the Christian missionary, this means the difference between introducing people to the true Kingdom of God or some smaller, cheaper imitation of the kingdom. The task of providing theological grounding for missions is neither easy nor appreciated. Missions has seldom been seen as a primary task of the church, and such breakout events as the Protestant Reformation did little to further the task of taking the gospel of the kingdom to the ends of the earth. It is thanks to normal, everyday people like William Carey, Saint Ignatius of Loyola, Count Zinzendorf, Adoniram Judson, and Hudson Taylor that the Great Commission became an issue for the church again in the 18th and 19th centuries. Today, as churches seek to reach the Jerusalem surrounding their walls, the task of bringing the truth and blessing of God's kingdom to all the peoples and nations of the world again has to fight for the attention of God's people. Mission agencies, schools of World Missions, and classes like Perspectives are working to rouse the citizens of the kingdom to not lose sight of Yahweh's will for the world. Perhaps, given such difficulties, especially in America, we should be happy that missions take place at all.

But we can never be satisfied with missions programs or mission theologies just because they exist. Their presence is important, but if they fail to preach the full Good News of the Kingdom of God they do not serve the kingdom well. The desire of all Christians should be to see the true Kingdom of God come to all creation. But is it the true Kingdom of God, and all its righteousness/justice that is being preached? To answer this, the theological grounding for missions must be evaluated.

Mission thinkers are numerous, and the task of evaluating them all is beyond the scope of this paper. To narrow the focus three western writers will be used to evaluate the closeness and success of their theologies to the Kingdom of God. It would not be completely accurate to consider Leslie Newbigin and John V. Taylor as western thinkers, for both served as missionaries to the non-Western world, but come from Western world. The third mission theologian is John Stott, the Anglican thinker who has had an increasing influence on American mission thinking.

John Stott

John Stott opens his book Christian Mission in the Modern World by stating his chief concern in writing the book is “to bring both ecumenical and Evangelical thinking to the same independent and objective test, namely that of biblical revelation” (Stott 1975:12). The desire to test the thinking and goals of mission strategies against biblical revelation is a task this paper and Stott have in common. There is also much in common between the conclusions of Stott and the conclusions reached earlier in this paper on the importance of missions touching human relationships, on social responsibility, and on the impact of salvation within this life as well as the next. There is also much disagreement in the foundational concept of salvation.

Points of Agreement

Social Action

Stott underwent a conversion from traditional Evangelical thinking with regard to the importance of social action and responsibility in Christian mission. Many mission thinkers have also undergone a similar revolution in their thinking over the past thirty years. Noted missiologist David Bosch uses Stott as representative of this change. Bosch discusses the synthesis of the two mandates (evangelism and social action) in modern mission theology, and gives John Stott credit as one of the leaders of this movement (Bosch 1991:405). Stott himself admits to this change from one of traditional evangelism (preaching, conversion, and teaching) to a more broad definition of mission:

Today I would express myself differently. It is not just that the commission includes a duty to teach converts everything Jesus had previously commanded (Matthew 28:20), and social responsibility is among those things which Jesus commanded. I now see more clearly that not only the consequences of the commission but the actual commission itself must be understood to include social as well as evangelistic responsibility, unless we are to be guilty of distorting the words of Jesus (Stott 1975:23).

This statement, a foundational one for Stott’s writing, is not based, however, on the Kingdom of God. Rather his basis for the shift in thinking is what he feels is the crucial expression of the Great Commission—John 20:21—Jesus’ sending of the disciples as he had been sent. For Stott, being sent cannot be wholly duplicated since Jesus alone came to “seek and save the lost” (Luke 19:10) and make atonement for all sins (1 John

4:9,10,14). But as much as possible, the life and ministry which Jesus Christ had on earth is to be repeated in Christian missions. Jesus' selfless service becomes the goal of Christian mission and all that this includes:

Certainly he preached, proclaiming the good news of the Kingdom of God and teaching about the coming nature of the kingdom, how to enter it and how it would spread. But he served in deed as well as in word, and it would be impossible in the ministry of Jesus to separate his works from his words. He fed hungry mouths and washed dirty feet, he healed the sick, comforted the sad and even restored the dead to life (Stott 1975:24).

For Stott the **person** of Jesus, not his kingdom, is the key to understanding what mission is. Jesus is the ultimate missionary, entering into human reality and culture and bringing the good news to the people. Stott believes the key to understanding what missions is and does is to follow Jesus around, to emulate him, to follow in his footsteps. Stott's focus on Jesus and not the kingdom will cause disagreement with my conclusions over what salvation is and is not.

Stott claims not to see social action as subservient to evangelism (although he does later place it in a secondary position). He calls evangelism and social action two partners that belong to each other and yet are independent of each other (Stott 1975:27), and states that one may precede the other given different situations. Any view of social action is improper that is short of partnership with evangelism, placing social action as a means to evangelism or as signs of evangelism (Stott 1975:26). These views do not meet the measure of biblical revelation that Stott has established.

Impact on Human Relationships

Since Stott has based his mission theory on the ministry and life of Jesus, the Great Commandment becomes a source of both challenge to human relationships and a hope for their development. Stott's thinking is tightly wedded to his view on social action. If we are commanded to love our neighbor, then yes, we will share the good news of the kingdom (meaning evangelism in this context), but love of neighbor means treating our neighbor as more than a disembodied soul. We must be committed to the total welfare of our neighbor, the good of his soul, his body and his community (Stott 1975:29-30). Stott sees the need to bring the good news into every dimension of human life (something he fails to see later), with the result that as with Zacchaeus, the good news should radically impact our social relations:

Moreover, it is this vision of man as a social being, as well as a psychosomatic being, which obliges us to add a political dimension to our social service. Humanitarian activity cares for the casualties of a sick society. We should be concerned with preventative medicine or community health as well, which means the quest for better social structures in which peace, dignity, freedom, and justice are secured for all men (Stott 1975:30).

Stott believes the love of neighbor permeates more than just private relations, but spreads across the boundaries of individual relationships to the community and societal levels. In this I agree with him. This is an element of salvation to the kingdom which is too often missed in missions programs. While Stott does not see this in itself as salvation (my main point of contention), the desired results in this area are not radically different from my goals for missions.

Opposition to the Forces of Evil

The previous quote from Stott identifies him as one opposed to the hidden evil powers of the world. He understands that the evil in the world that causes sickness is not limited to people, but also manifests itself in poverty, wars, and repression. Stott builds a vision of Christian works that seeks kingdom life on earth:

...a part of their calling will be to seek to maintain Christ's standards of justice, righteousness, honesty, human dignity, and compassion in a society which no longer accepts them (Stott 1975:32).

Stott is for combating the opponents of the kingdom, and he is for waging the battle in the proper manner.

Stott talks about Elenctics, from the Greek to convince, convict, or rebuke so as to call for repentance. This practice should result in the call to responsibility and the unmasking of sin, but it is done in positive and personal ways (Stott 1975:70). When Christians oppose evil powers in the world it is important to realize that we battle not against flesh and blood but against principalities and powers. People are often tools (often willing ones), acting as the front men for evil power throughout this world. Jesus' call for service and not vengeance in Matthew 5:38-47 and Paul's comments on opposing evil in Romans 12:14-21 are based not simply on defeating evil (Christ has done this and his victory spreads where the kingdom goes), but on overcoming evil with good and bringing to people the knowledge of the merciful and powerful God who is the only good One. Stott's desire to see conversations with non-Christians be marked by authenticity, humility, integrity, and sensitivity (Stott 1975:71-73) resonates with kingdom understanding. This is an area where Stott's theology is focused on announcing the reign of God and his kingdom.

Point of Disagreement

Salvation and Social Action

Stott's theology of mission is one, as I said earlier, with which I can find many points of agreement. Many kingdom elements permeate the thinking and foundations of his work. If Stott's work was the only book that was allowed in mission thinking I do believe kingdom missions would be much more the norm than the exception. However, one main point of disagreement unravels the affinity of Stott's theology with the kingdom. His definition of salvation, narrowed and based on concepts other than the Kingdom of God, is too far from what biblical salvation is (as based on the kingdom). This distance would ultimately move missions from being the oriented towards Kingdom of God to being focused upon a kingdom of a god who is still short of the true God.

Stott begins his discussion on salvation by attacking two different definitions. The first is salvation as psycho-physical health. Here he attacks the idea that salvation is wholeness. Stott does not deny that the scriptures reveal much about wholeness, nor that the healings and miracles of God's chosen ones are not attacks against the intrusion of evil into God's world (Stott 1975:85). He says that these physical things often "follow salvation" (Stott 1975:85). His denial is that healing is what the Bible means by salvation. Here I must agree with him as far as I can. The meaning of salvation is not healing **focused**, for that sense of salvation is totally earth bound. Salvation as conversion to the Kingdom of God transcends the earthly nature, and touches the whole of a person, not just the physical. But in attacking a heretical view of salvation Stott narrows the impact of the reign of God. Stott argues against the inclusion of physical elements of salvation denying the potency of the second use of salvation meaning to save, as in from drowning (Stott 1975:87). This argument is poor hermeneutics with a blind eye to the richness of human language. He is unwilling to allow any element into salvation which does not deal with man's rebellion:

Salvation by faith in Christ crucified and risen is moral, not material, a rescue from sin not from harm, and the reason why Jesus said 'your faith has saved you' to both categories is that his works of physical rescue (from disease, drowning and death) were intentional signs of his salvation, and were thus understood by the early church (Stott 1975:87).

The Kingdom of God, as found in the pages of scripture, does not allow for the spiritualizing of salvation. Salvation is also physical and material. God has complete sovereignty over the fullness of humanity—

physical, emotional, and spiritual. Yes, people are rebels, but they are also under oppression by the forces of evil. Kingdom salvation heals the rebellion, forgives the transgressions, and lifts the oppression of the evil forces in the world.

Stott never addresses what the kingdom is and what it should mean. Saying that physical restoration comes after the reign of God is a semantic device—it comes after one enters the kingdom, because entrance into the Kingdom of God means entrance into a kingdom of wholeness. Jesus' gospel was the gospel of the kingdom, and his salvation is salvation out of the kingdom of evil and into the Kingdom of God. Stott never looks to the kingdom for guidance on what salvation means.

I find arbitrary his argument that the early church took the meaning of salvation to be moral and not tied to the other items to which Jesus connected it. The description in Acts 2, the earliest church, as I have argued, is of a community living as people of the kingdom, having received the salvation to God's kingdom. Their activities are holistic, not simply moral. James' letter to the church states that faith without faith in the reign of God (and the works that are kingdom works) is dead. It is true that the 2nd and 3rd century early church tended to be more morally than physically oriented. But I find no ground for argument from scripture that the earliest church implemented such a false dichotomy.

Stott's polemic against errant views of salvation continues when he addresses the political liberation view of salvation. Here I am in almost total agreement with his arguments. I find that most of the liberation views seek not to bring the reign of God to earth, but to elevate the reign of a group of people who have previously been oppressed. These liberation views also fail to address the liberation of people from sin. Sin is not simply selfishness, which can be overcome by utopian communities. Sin is an oppression that goes beyond selfishness to the point of deifying the individual over and against the rest of the world. True liberation, liberation that the Kingdom of God brings, is liberation from all the oppressors, including sin. I also agree that when we fail to include the victory of God over all earthly powers of liberation we do a disservice to scripture and to the character of God (Stott 1975:91).

Stott finally addresses what he believes salvation is—personal freedom. At first this simple definition left me completely unsatisfied. But Stott builds on this concept by defining this freedom, not in the way the

world does, but in the way scripture does. Freedom means liberation, the Old Testament idea of roominess and broadness against oppression's narrowness. Freedom, and here he cites Lord Michael Ramsey, means "free from someone and free for someone. He is free from self and free for God" (Stott 1975:102). Stott's freedom turns out to be a freedom to serve, to be for neighbor (conversion as conversion to neighbor). Stott's freedom is even more; it is freedom from wrath and to sonship. But he stops short of examining the implications of this sonship.

Stott's salvation is part of the already and not yet realities of God's reign. Again, here I can agree. The kingdom has come, but the reality is still not felt everywhere, every moment, in every life. We exit and enter the reign of God, toying with rebellion, but having known the goodness of Gods' reign, we return to the kingdom. This is Stott's sanctification process (Stott 1975:104-105). We are still awaiting the glory of God. The expectancy of our own salvation/freedom is the core of human hope.

Again, as far as Stott is willing to go, I can agree with him. The greatest failing in his argument for salvation as personal freedom and sonship is that he gives little basis for his argument. Why do we receive freedom? From whence does this definition of freedom come? How far does it extend? Freedom is part of the constitution of the Kingdom of God. We see it in Jesus' life (which seems to be the hermeneutical ground from which Stott argues), but we see it in his life as the personification of the kingdom. Jesus' actions are not independent of the kingdom, nor do they simply reflect God's will. The kingdom is God's will and it is the goal and meaning of salvation.

There are similar difficulties with Stott's argument for social action as part of missions. To the extent that he looks at the words of the prophets and the life and actions of Jesus Stott recognizes that social action is mission. But he never seeks the basis of why scripture demonstrates this. He fails to connect the character of the kingdom with holistic liberation. He asks that Christians participate in social action in order to be obedient (an outflowing of their own personal salvation/freedom) to what God has demanded of us. It reminds me of my fellow Calvinist who says she prays because she is obedient— not because prayer is good, it connects with God's will, or is a chosen tool of God. Stott's failure to put both personal freedom and social action into their larger context painfully limits his account of the gospel of Jesus.

Though I agree with Stott's ultimate conclusion that social action is mission, I believe that his basis for this has many shortcomings. First, despite what he claims earlier, Stott **does** place evangelism as primary (Stott 1975:35). In practical functionality it means that when dollars and resources are assigned, evangelism will always be rewarded with more of the important bounty. The Western church is focused on results, primarily tabulated in conversions. Those without "fruit" to show for their hard work will either view themselves as failures and give up or likely be recalled from service (as several people I know have been). While Stott admonishes his audience for thinking in that manner (Stott 1975:38-39), he fails to adequately address how to change the inclination to think this way. His emphasis upon preaching and teaching as primary also fails to keep with his stated desire for missions—to be sent as Jesus was sent. In my earlier sections on the biblical review of the kingdom I focused a great deal of attention on Jesus and his relationship to the kingdom, which show how Jesus' ministry transcended the dichotomy of evangelism and social action. While Stott agrees with this, he believes Jesus placed evangelism in primacy over social action. Jesus' gospel was the gospel of the kingdom. His life and ministry was a perfect balance and harmony between Stott's two partners—a balance based on relationship with the Father. I believe that Stott's decision to give primacy to one over the other is incorrect.

This error flows out the Stott's decision not to base the foundation for social action on the kingdom, but rather on the life and ministry of Jesus, who came announcing the good news of the kingdom. His message was not shouted into a vacuum of human history and thinking. Jesus announced this to people who were best prepared to understand the reign and rule of God. Jesus' offer of salvation is an entrance into the Kingdom of God—no more can be offered. Stott's salvation comes close in many places to the kingdom idea of salvation, but it remains detached from the greater picture of what God's kingdom means. While Stott's theology will produce good in missions, it will lack the manifestation of the impact of God's reign coming to earth, leading inevitably to the narrowing of the salvation experience and the falling short of the explosion God's kingdom salvation can bring.

John V. Taylor

John Stott's primary premise is that biblical revelation is the measure for any mission theology. For Taylor, the church is the missionary community of the Holy Spirit, the "Go Between God," as his book is titled (Bosch 1991:378). Taylor's book is not a scholarly report on the importance of missions, its basis, and the theology of missions. It is a book for the masses, bringing out important concepts, which are unfortunately hidden by superfluous language which is meant to keep the reader entertained. As such, it is much more difficult to nail down my areas of agreement and disagreement with Taylor.

In John Stott's chapter on social action Taylor is criticized as a defender of social action as part of evangelism. Stott sees Taylor making social action a subdivision of the proclamation of the gospel, rather than a partner (Stott 1975:27). Nowhere, however, in either of Taylor's two books I read (the second being Kingdom Come) does he make this clear of a statement on the subject of social action. Instead, he weaves a story based on the Spirit's interaction with the church. The lack of any clear and challenging statement, as Stott gives, necessitates a more serious scrutiny of Taylor's theology.

Points of Agreement

Communal Life and Universal Brotherhood

Taylor takes a high view of the church community. It is the missionary community of the Holy Spirit, but it is also the community through which the sonship of God translates into the brotherhood of the church. For Taylor the impact of salvation (see below in Points of Disagreement for Taylor's definition of salvation) on the church community is the constant reminder that they are not a selection of winners, but only a company of those who accept one another as Christ has accepted them (Taylor 1972:122). The citizens of the kingdom are to be a healing community, one that never accepts evil and destruction in their midst. With this I heartily agree. Taylor's church is a brotherhood (and sisterhood) of people who are not passive about the problems of the world. But the action is initiated and completed by the Holy Spirit (Taylor 1972:206). In fact the Christian community acts as a tool of healing:

Such an act (laying on of hands) is symbolic of the communal acceptance of responsibility for the one in need, offering him the love of a caring group,

and this alone may be sufficient to set a patient free from all anxiety and liberate the process of healing within his own organism (Taylor 1972:207).

Taylor's Christian community (which I identify with kingdom citizens) is one that demonstrates kingdom characteristics within its midst, and whose impact has results in this world and this life. In Taylor's own words, the church is made up of Christians living the kingdom life as men in the world (Taylor 1972:135).

The Christian life is a life not lived out in some other world, but in this one:

The mission of the church, therefore, is to live the ordinary life of men in that extraordinary awareness of the other and self-sacrifice of the other which the Spirit gives. Christian activity will be very largely the same as the world's activity - earning a living, bringing up a family, making friends, having fun, celebrating occasions, farming, manufacturing, trading, building cities, healing sickness, alleviating distress, mourning, studying, exploring, making music, and so on (Taylor 1972:135).

Taylor sees the impact of the Holy Spirit, the person and Kingdom of God living within us, as a changing force, one that creates more *human* humans:

What I have seen is that most really believing Christians are more scrupulous, patient, and personally caring than others, both among their neighbors and in the church organizations, more unselfish too (Taylor 1972:124).

These are kingdom people, committed to the meaning of the kingdom. I find Taylor's expectation of its citizenry to be exactly what kingdom missions should produce.

Opposition to Evil

Taylor does not have much to say about opposing evil, but what he does say is valuable. His definition of evil is a broad one that includes within its boundaries the societal forces that destroy humanity. Taylor understands opposition against evil to take the form of evangelism, but he sees it as a truly Christian mission mandate:

Christ-like evangelism consists in the passionate serving of the personhood of men in protest against all depersonalizing forces of the world (Taylor 1972:137).

Taylor rightly opposes any focus upon the opposition of evil that does not include liberation of the whole sinful man. He sees those that hold to strictly a humanizing mission as individuals trying to polarize the people of God (clearly not a kingdom characteristic). Instead, Taylor calls for a joining of opposition against evil with the proclamation of Christ.

Perceiving what God is doing in the movement of history and trying to do it with him; offering prophetic interpretation of events; and nerving men to action through the power of a future which eschatological hope projects back to the future (Taylor 1972:140).

While he states the above, Taylor calls for such to be done with an eye towards the completed promise of the Messiah:

If a theology of hope means that we lose our assurance of the already-giveness of the Kingdom, then it is defective (Taylor 1972:140).

Opposition to evil is critical, and can be used as a tool of evangelism:

It is no deviation for us to move into a more direct role in inducing social change and the break-down of historic systems... The gospel compels us, of course, to do all we can to liberate people and society from what are called their 'problems'; but even more it demands that we liberate them from the very assumptions that underlie our use of the words 'problems' and 'solutions' (Taylor 1972:142-143).

While I do not agree with the dichotomy that Taylor places between evangelism and opposing evil, I do agree that we do not supersede one hope with another. Evil must be opposed, and the kingdom has the answer to all evil—societal, communal, and personal. For Taylor, the church is called to live in light of the kingdom that has come, and that life must include opposition to evil and the offering of hope:

If tomorrow's bread, the justice and peace of the Kingdom, can be given today, if the forgiveness of the jubilee age to come can be the way of life in the present for those who will accept it, the great ordeal which puts the inner core of individuals and nations to the test must also be confronted in the here and now by those who have dared to live the future now (Taylor 1989:103).

Social Action

Taylor's understanding of social action within mission is complex. As I stated earlier, he never makes a clear statement regarding the place and ground for such action. What I did perceive from his writing is an understanding of social action with which I can partly agree, and partly disagree. I will raise my points of disagreement later.

Taylor is not focused on the Kingdom of God as the primary understanding of the mission of the church. This is clear from the approach he takes throughout the book. But the kingdom is also not completely foreign to his understanding. The previous quote from Taylor's 1989, Kingdom Come, draws the kingdom into the life of the church, the missionary force of the "Go-between God." Somewhere within missions the

task of bringing justice and peace has a “place” for Taylor. While I do not agree with the placement, I applaud Taylor’s inclusion of social action under the auspices of the community of God’s people.

Evangelicalism has for most of the century been remiss in not understanding that the peace and justice of the kingdom are not optional. Taylor understands this and reminds the church of the necessity of these activities. The earlier quote on the ordinary life of kingdom Christians exemplified many of these social actions: healing sickness, alleviating distress, and mourning (Taylor 1972:135). In this we can agree.

But as one digs deeper into Taylor’s service theology, it is clear that he is not talking about a theology of mission which unites service as a partner of evangelism. This dichotomy comes from a traditionally narrow understanding of what salvation is, and how this world interacts with the promises of that salvation.

Points of Disagreement

Salvation and Social Action Theology

Unlike Stott, Taylor does not give a nice one line answer to the question of what salvation is. The meaning is pulled together from several places. First, salvation is the forgiveness of sins. Taylor points out that to the very end Christ died forgiving us (Taylor 1972:103). Second, salvation is knowing that one is totally accepted by Christ, and this is not due to human perfection (Taylor 1972:122). Third, salvation is based on the invitation to know Jesus (Taylor 1972:136). All else— opposing evil and serving and helping others— should lead naturally to inviting people to know Jesus. Fourth, salvation in Taylor’s understanding is freedom (Taylor 1972:172). This freedom is similar to Stott’s freedom, in that it is grounded in forgiveness, and that it allows for responsible decisions in the world (Taylor 1972:173). Taylor’s salvation is the core meaning of traditional 20th century Evangelical salvation.

Taylor would reject “salvation to the Kingdom of God,” as embodied in the incarnation, life, death, and resurrection of Jesus Christ. In my view, holistic, all-penetrating salvation that kingdom salvation brings includes all the things that Taylor has stated. Indeed, the vertical relationship is in no way reduced in the definition of salvation that I have outlined from the Kingdom of God. But, unlike Taylor’s salvation, it does not stop there.

Taylor does include many of the other elements of kingdom salvation in his doctrine of the Christian church. But always the idea of justice, mercy, liberation, and wholeness are either seen as helping to proclaim the gospel or as somehow an resulting fruit of salvation. Taylor's idea that they serve evangelism does help to ensure that the listener to this "gospel" understands the character of God. I can affirm the idea as Taylor states it here:

We may hesitate to interpret the gospel in such overt terms of political analysis as some liberation theologians are doing, but we cannot deny that the destitute and victimized, 'the little one', as Jesus called them, were in the forefront of his mind when he went about proclaiming the Kingdom of God was close at hand (Taylor 1989:43).

This can further be seen in Taylor's theology of social action. Social action is always seen as a tool of proclamation, and not as a component of salvation. Every mention of social action, and, to be fair, as I pointed out earlier, Taylor mentions social action repeatedly, is in terms of *kerygma* and in terms of evangelism. The clearest statement of this is when Taylor speaks about Jesus' own healings:

His service to men, therefore, was always kerugmatic, part of the announcement. This is the link back to the prophet's promise of justice and deliverance from oppression (Taylor 1972:141).

Unfortunately, Taylor misses the fact that Jesus' gospel was the gospel of the Kingdom. The salvation promised within it means more than fruits of justice and wholeness. Salvation is justice, wholeness, **and** right relationship with God. This may seem to be a quibbling over semantics. Are these the fruits of salvation, or are they part of salvation itself? But the difference creates huge implications in the carrying out of missions. First, social action taken to proclaim the gospel rather than as part of the gospel can (and has) created situations of manipulation. Second, since Taylor sees social action as only one part of evangelism, it can, and for many would, be the proclamation of last resort. The gospel of the Kingdom of God does not give the evangelist that option.

Taylor's failure to consider the Kingdom of God as the basis for salvation leaves the gospel that he would proclaim detached from the greater message of the scriptures. While he does see the Kingdom of God as a result of mission, it is not the focus, and is presented as a future fruit, one that is too nebulous to talk about as more than just a hope.

Although Taylor's theology of missions falls short, I do think that he brings his audience somewhat closer to a theology of missions that is more focused on the Kingdom of God. Taylor brings the hard-line, traditional Evangelical into a world where social action is at least discussed. He reminds the audience that justice, peace, and freedom, as well as forgiveness, are God's desires. Taylor's theology is a good first step into the world of kingdom missions—but if theology does not move further it will not be true to Jesus' proclamation.

Leslie Newbigin

Leslie Newbigin was a long-time missionary in India, and later bishop in the Church of South India. He has played a major role in the ecumenical movement, serving in the World Council of Churches, but his writings show a zeal for truth and the primacy of Jesus Christ that many Evangelicals have found to resonate with their own thinking. Newbigin's broad range of experiences in both the "liberal" and "conservative" camps provides him with unique insights.

Newbigin's book, The Open Secret (1995 Revised Edition) is intended to be an introduction to mission theology. Newbigin, like Stott, spells out relatively clearly what he expects from missions, and what the foundation for mission is. Newbigin's foundation is the Kingdom of God. For Newbigin, God's history—the movement toward completion of the gracious purpose that has its source in the love of the Father for the Son through the Spirit—is the place where we must begin to understand what the Kingdom of God means. In God's history it is clear that the Kingdom of God means the reign of God is his reign over all things (Newbigin 1995:31).

Using the Mark 1:1-15 passage Newbigin first unfolds the Kingdom of God and what it reveals about Jesus Christ. For Newbigin, the first revelation of this passage is Jesus as the announcer of the reign of God (Newbigin 1995:21). His entrance into the world is the announcement of a new day. Newbigin does not see Jesus as the initiator of the kingdom, since the kingdom is God's kingdom. Jesus is the herald and bearer of the kingdom, a kingdom that biblical history has been revealing (Newbigin 1995:22). Lest anyone think that Newbigin's Jesus is not part of the Trinity, the second revelation from this passage is that Jesus is the Son of God. This means that Jesus is both bearer of the kingdom and, at the same time, perfectly obedient to the Father. The third revelation from this passage is that Jesus is anointed by the Spirit of God. It may seem that what is revealed in Newbigin's review of Mark 1:1-15 has little bearing on the meaning of the Kingdom of God and its centrality in Newbigin's mission theology. Quite the contrary, what he is doing by bringing us back to Jesus' starting point in earthly ministry is drawing us to the Trinity. For Newbigin, the mission of God is the mission of the triune God, not an unbiblical monad. Only in relation to the Trinity can the kingdom be understood, for it is the Kingdom of the Father, Son, and Spirit God. It is from this reference that

Newbigin will discuss Christian missions—as proclaiming the Kingdom of the Father, as sharing the life of the Son, and as bearing the witness of the Spirit (Newbigin 1995:29).

Leslie Newbigin’s theology of missions comes closest to the findings of my own research on the Kingdom of God. I spent many pages at the beginning of this paper pulling together the meaning of God’s intention for the kingdom, and trying to see how that fits in with what missions should be about. It appears that Leslie Newbigin has done the same. Because of this there are many points of agreement.

Points of Agreement

God’s Reign as Seen in this World

The Kingdom of the Father has come, though the news seems hard to believe given the strife in our world. Newbigin sees that Jesus’ announcement of the reign of God has implications for present reality:

It is, to be precise, the reign of God, the fact that God whom Jesus knows as Father is the sovereign ruler of all peoples and all things. The announcement means that this fact is no longer something remote—far up in heaven or far away in the future. It is an impending reality, in fact, the one great reality that confronts men and women now with the need for decision (Newbigin 1995:34).

At this point Newbigin takes a different approach than I on how this should play out. Rather than focus on the reality that God’s kingdom is permeating the whole world (even though it is still opposed in many places) Newbigin focuses on the mystery of the kingdom. The kingdom has come, he says, but not so much in power as in weakness. Yes, of course, there is power; Jesus’ own ministry demonstrates that (Newbigin 1995:35). But that power is awaiting the action of God. It is the hiddenness of the parables, the offense of the kingdom’s power being revealed in humility and sacrifice, and ultimately death. But for Newbigin, Christ’s resurrection helps to reveal the mystery:

The initial announcement of the “good news,” namely, that “the reign of God has drawn near,” is validated by the resurrection. The reign of God is both revealed and hidden in the words and works of Jesus and supremely in his cross and resurrection (Newbigin 1995:37).

It seems that this is Newbigin’s way of dealing with the “already and not yet” component of the reign of God. While the reign of God does mean he is sovereign over the affairs of the world, it has been revealed in salvation, in a form that the world rarely recognizes. The reign of God, and its total salvation, offers

something that can ignite the dreams and passions of people. This makes the world dangerous because there will always be people, false messiahs, who try to meet those dreams with earthly power and force (Newbigin 1995:38).

Ultimately, the focus is upon God's reign, hidden within suffering and tribulation. Newbigin emphasizes repeatedly that this is the secret that has been entrusted to us. This results in what Newbigin calls mission as faith in action:

Mission, seen from this angle, is faith in action. It is the acting out by proclamation and by endurance, through all the events of history, of the faith that the Kingdom of God had drawn near. It is the acting out of the central prayer that Jesus taught his disciples to use: "Father, hallowed be thy name, thy kingdom come; thy will be done on earth as in heaven (Newbigin 1995:39).

For Newbigin salvation and the reign of God must impact this life. It may appear that Newbigin's kingdom is a defeated one on earth, but as he develops his theology for social action he will dispel that notion.

Comprehensive Salvation

Whereas Stott is unwilling to extend salvation past freedom and Taylor never really clarifies what salvation is beyond traditional definitions, Newbigin, in light of the Kingdom of God, is very direct and comprehensive in his definition of salvation. With the Kingdom of God as the central grounding for mission, Newbigin includes elements beyond forgiveness of sins and "a home in heaven."

Mission begins with the church, God's people, and Newbigin clarifies what the church is to be. He refers to the church as the bearer of the presence of the kingdom in its role as a missionary body (Newbigin 1995:53). The church in this role must overthrow evil and establish justice, mercy and truth. This is quite a call. It does this not as a righteous community, for we ourselves are not righteous, but because God has called and chosen this company of people to be the bearers of his kingdom; his goodness and power will be the force behind this mission (Newbigin 1995:54).

Since God's community is to be a place where justice, mercy, and truth reign, it is proper to begin there with a discussion of salvation. Clearly, salvation will include these elements, but it does not end there. Newbigin includes the component of relatedness, of salvation that is not primarily private but spreads into all

relationships. This begins with entrance into the Kingdom of God, and, indeed, flows out of the very nature of God:

God as revealed to us in the gospel, is not a monad. Interpersonal relatedness belongs to the very nature of God. Therefore there can be no salvation for human beings except in relatedness. No one can be made whole except by being restored to the wholeness of that being-in-relatedness for which God made us and the world and which is the image of that being-in-relatedness which is the being God himself (Newbigin 1995:70).

While there is an element of the individual in salvation, as there is any relationship, the salvation of the gospel of kingdom will not be true salvation unless it includes the mutual interdependence that God intended for creation:

This salvation can only be in mutual dependence and relatedness. As I said earlier, the corporate nature of the salvation that God purposes is a necessary part of the divine purpose of salvation according to the biblical view that no one could receive it as a direct revelation from above but only through the neighbor, only as part of an action in which one opens one's door and invites one's neighbor to come in (Newbigin 1995:76).

Newbigin's salvation includes the otherness that the gospel of the kingdom requires. It includes restoration not just of the person from sin, but of relationships from the self-serving that marks all relationships outside of the Kingdom of God. Newbigin's definition of salvation is "bringing wholeness." But what does this wholeness look like? How do missions act to bring it about? Newbigin addresses that in his chapter on social justice.

Newbigin's Theology of Social Action

After Newbigin defines what the mission of God's people must be if it is to hold true to the kingdom, he asks the tough question, "What are the actions by which the believing community will fulfill God's purpose for it as the community chosen, called, and sent with a view to the salvation of the world?" (Newbigin 1995:90). Indeed, what should this look like when played out against the backdrop of the evil which obscures the reign of God?

Newbigin believes that missions have never been able to separate the preaching of the gospel from action for God's justice (Newbigin 1995:91). While attempts have been made to separate the two (and I will assert we may be trying to separate them in Evangelical missions) it should not be done. Perhaps some of the

movement away from “justice actions” have been good. At times the task of “civilizing” people has replaced bringing them kingdom salvation. Newbigin is not talking here about mere development, which he sees as a transitional phase (Newbigin 1995:93), but the flourishing of God’s love and justice. Development can bring clean water and better schools, but if these institutions are the end point, they can become tools for benevolent repression. God’s justice stands against any sort of exploitation, and though it is separate from God’s love, they work together:

...where justice is denied love is certainly denied. If the economic order is such that the owners of land and capital can and do exploit and oppress the workers, then the commandment of love must mean more than marginal acts of personal charity; it must mean action to end exploitation (Newbigin 1995:97).

Newbigin’s theology of social action is built into his mission theology, because, as he states, we all live with the desire to find a mission practice which enables us to have people know Jesus as personal savior and the longing that everyone enjoy political and cultural freedom and human dignity (Newbigin 1995:101). While we all seek “holistic evangelism,” it is hard to make this reality. What becomes clear is that the idea of God’s justice needs to be reappraised if it is to be properly implemented in mission theology. For those committed to the full gospel of the kingdom, God’s reign must be at the center of any social action:

If we acknowledge the God of the Bible, we are committed to struggle for justice in society. Justice means giving to each his or her due. Our problem (as seen in the light of the gospel) is that each of us overestimates what is due to us as compared with what is due to our neighbors. Consequently, justice cannot be done, for everyone will judge in his or her own favor. Justice is done only when we all acknowledge a judge with authority over us, in relation to whose judgement we must relativize our own (Newbigin 1995:111).

Christian mission done in light of the kingdom must constantly refocus people’s attention upon the one to whose kingdom we introduce them. In that light justice can be done. In that light the wisdom to oppose these structures can be attained.

Newbigin never directly addresses the issue of opposing evil. He does not need to. For him the mission of the kingdom necessarily includes opposing the evils of this world. The challenge of addressing evil, as Newbigin points out above, is that the identification of the enemy must be made by the Father who is also judge.

Christianity and Other Religions

Newbigin's experiences in India have given him the opportunity to interact with many different religions, most notably Hinduism. How should the Christian faith view other religions? What should dialogue look like? Newbigin presents several core building blocks from which to view other faiths.

First, we cannot say that everything within other faiths is wrong. For example, the reality of translation work has often forced the use of the name of pagan supreme beings for God. Even more, there is some light within every faith, some points of agreement. Because Jesus' light lightens every person, an element of truth resides in them, and to a lesser extent, in their faiths. Second, other faiths can be demonic. Religion, Newbigin states is the battlefield *par excellence* of the demonic (Newbigin 1995:170). The importance of religion in the life of people means that the deceiver has much to gain from operating in this arena:

Religion, including the Christian religion, can be the sphere in which evil exhibits a power against which human reason and conscience are powerless (Newbigin 1995:170).

Third, other faiths are not the feeding ground for the gospel of Jesus Christ. The questions asked and answered by Hinduism are not the same as the ones upon which Christianity is focused (Newbigin 1995:171). Other religions stand on their own, and while there are always points of agreement within faiths, the acknowledgment that Jesus is Lord is clearly an affront to the nature of those faiths. We cannot merely say that those who fail to acknowledge the lordship of Christ are anonymous Christians (Newbigin 1995:174). The gospel stands in opposition to the schemes of the world.

Having built a standard for viewing other faiths, Newbigin lists the qualities of dialogue with other faiths. First, we need to approach the dialogue humbly. We do not approach as the one saved to the one lost, but simply as a witness to the fact that Jesus can make sense of the whole human experience (Newbigin 1995:174). Second, and building on the first, we must acknowledge that God is likely already at work in the life of this individual. Here is where we must credit the devotion to doing "good" of many individuals of other faiths. We must affirm that and respect their service to those actions that bring life rather than death (Newbigin 1995:175). Third, we must always remember that while the non-Christian has done good things, human history is filled with the terrible reality that we always take that which God means for good and use it

for evil. There can be no decision to leave the devout, “good” adherent of another faith within that faith because he is better off. No, Jesus is the consummation, the fulfillment of all that humans hold so dear. God’s purpose of salvation must always be accomplished through the person and life of Jesus Christ. There is no middle way between alternative religions and kingdom salvation (Newbigin 1995:176-177). Of final concern to understanding Newbigin’s kingdom impact on dialogue is the emphasis on the true gospel. The offer of salvation is not outside of history and reality—it is initiated and consummated within history! This stands in contrast to some faiths, and to the Christian message so often shared with other religions. The culmination of the gospel of the kingdom stands in contrast to all that is apart from Christ:

The end envisaged is the reconciliation of all things in heaven and earth in Christ (Colossians 1:20), the “summing up of all things in Christ” (Ephesians 1:10), the liberation of the entire creation from its bondage (Romans 8:19-21). The object to which God’s purpose of grace is directed is the whole creation and the whole human family, not human souls conceived as billions of separate monads, each detached from its place in the whole fabric of the human and natural world...The salvation which is promised in Christ and of which his bodily resurrection is the firstfruit is not to be conceived simply as the fulfillment of the personal spiritual history of each individual being (Newbigin 1995:177-178).

For Newbigin, dialogue with other faiths is done with respect and humility, but it is always focused on the kingdom, kingdom salvation, and introducing other faiths to the realities and promises that this message brings.

Points of Disagreement

Not Enough of all the Things that Need to be Said

There is little that I can say in disagreement to Newbigin’s theology of missions. He starts with the correct center- the Kingdom of the triune God. He connects the different elements of salvation—personal forgiveness, relational change and connectedness, and wholeness for all creation. His social action is directly tied to salvation and the kingdom. I find that he covers all the main points.

I am a Leslie Newbigin fan. Having read several of his books ([Gospel in a Pluralistic Society](#), [Foolishness to the Greeks](#), [Proper Confidence](#)) I knew that Newbigin was focused on the centrality of Christ and the truths that flow from him. Anyone familiar with his writing knows Newbigin’s faith and heart. In this book, some of those hallmarks of the Christian faith are not expounded, and the reader may become

concerned that their limited mention might be mistaken for lack of importance. This is my biggest complaint with Newbigin's theology as put forth in this book. Many of the traditional elements of mission and salvation, primarily forgiveness of sins and liberation from the bondage of death, receive limited treatment in this book. They are there, but for the Evangelical there are many new and challenging concepts in this book, concepts which I think would be easier to swallow if constantly joined with traditional themes with which more conservative readers are familiar.

Newbigin could have spent more time developing what the wholeness brought by the Kingdom of God really looks like. What does a person living within the grace of God's kingdom look like in every day life? John Taylor writes a great passage about how his joy of salvation came into "everyday, everywhere life." While Taylor does not build on it much more than Newbigin, he developed the positive elements more, as opposed to constantly challenging the reader with what the Kingdom of God is not.

Having said what I can negatively, I must say that Newbigin's theology of mission brings the church much, much closer to the ultimate goal—missions based on the Kingdom of God. No one can perfectly capture the kingdom within their mission theology. The kingdom is God-sized, vast beyond our capacity to comprehend or fulfill alone, and comes from the character of a God who we tend to reduce to an icon. While we cannot capture Yahweh's kingdom in human theologies of mission, Newbigin comes as close as anyone I have read to grasping that kingdom.

The Kingdom and Mission- What do I Expect?

The challenge of writing on a subject like the Kingdom of God is that you are bound to fall short of the mark. The boundaries of our definition of the kingdom are predicated upon the scarcity of time and resources. What I have realized is that if this is the case in writing a paper on the kingdom, how much more so it the case in the practice of integrating the kingdom into missions. I have been harsh to an extent in my evaluation of all the authors. Stott and Taylor received most of my lashing, and yet I am humbled by my inability to fully capture the Kingdom of God in the pages of my own writing. Why should they be any different? And what of my missionary friend I quoted at the beginning? Should I be amazed that she has not been able to fully integrate the Kingdom of God into her missionary practice? The Kingdom of God is much more than any one person, except for Christ, can announce and work towards. Grace, which is at the core of our faith, must be at the core of evaluating mission practices and theology.

Having acknowledged this, I find myself looking out at the world and seeing mission programs that have left the Kingdom of God completely out of their thinking. This is simply not acceptable. The very first class I ever took in seminary was taught by an American who has been teaching in Central and South America since the late 1960s. One story he shared captured the essence of my discomfort with Evangelical missions. He recounted that during his many travels to teach throughout Latin America during the 60s and 70s the governments were always on the look out for those entering the country who might oppose their often brutal regimes. My professor said that there was one way to speed up entry through the police and customs checkpoints. If you placed a Scofield Bible on top of your possessions the military officials would allow you to pass right on through. They identified those using the Scofield as Evangelicals, and, as such, ones who would not challenge the status quo. In fact, the message they would share with the people would make them more willing to accept the government and all its atrocities. This story outlines for me how far Evangelical missions have fallen from the tree of the Kingdom of God.

While the kingdom is complex and larger than human understanding, some things are clear. The kingdom must touch all of human life. Salvation must be a present reality for those who have received Christ, even though the totality has a future element. Salvation must move beyond privatistic personal spiritual

experiences and permeate the relationships in our lives. The gospel is a holistic one that promises wholeness to humans. And the kingdom calls us to oppose what is evil and to overcome it with good. What these kingdom elements will look like will vary from situation to situation. Each community has different areas in which it rebels against the reign of God. And Christians must work to announce the reign of God by use of God's power, God's ways, and God's means. We must keep our eyes focused upon that kingdom, or else we will be like those who throughout the ages have tried to set up an icon of the kingdom on earth.

I have outlined what I think the kingdom should mean in terms of mission theology. I found Leslie Newbigin to be an advocate of kingdom missions. Evangelical theology and missions must return to kingdom theology if they are to be successful, not in the eyes of humans and their statistics, but in the eyes of God. Bringing the Kingdom of God back to the centrality of the mission practices of the church is a huge task, one that hopefully is underway. As for my part, I will recommend Newbigin's book to anyone interested in missions. I will challenge my friends and missionaries to study the scriptures and see the fullness of the Kingdom of God. And I will pray daily the prayer of our Lord: Father, hallowed be thy name, thy kingdom come, on earth as it is in heaven.

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**The Kingdom of God and Missions: Returning God's Reign to
Mission Theology**

Christopher Morton
Fuller Theological Seminary