

**Gustavus Adolphus College**

**Salvation and the Kingdom of God in the Contemporary Church:  
Unity of Purpose and Mission in Designed and Necessary Tension**

**Senior Religion Seminar  
REL 399**

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### *Introduction*

One finds in the Bible a story of God's involvement with the human race he created and the people with whom he continues to be involved. The contemporary student who studies the canon in a time long past the apostolic age may recognize in this story a description of past lives, a prescription for present life, grounds to disagree or a means to unite. Who is this God? Who are these people? What is their relation? Wolfhart Pannenberg suggests the means that will be used in the following pages to help answer these questions. "God's rule is his being."<sup>1</sup> The qualification of the statement I will endorse is that God "exists" on earth to the extent his rule and Kingdom exist on earth in a practical and effective way. This is not to imply that God's fundamental existence depends on what people do. God is not brought into actual being or erased gradually from the universe because of human decision and action; however, the practical existence of God in the world is determined by His existing rule. This is similar to saying that the President of the United States "exists" in the country to the extent his influence is observable. If a certain individual or group does not find the influence of the president, no sufficient grounds exist to say that the person of the president is nonexistent. That conclusion would be irresponsible if the reality was that a personified president exists. Such is the place where this study concerning God will begin. The Kingdom of God is a much-used biblical and ecclesiological concept in the story of God's involvement with people. The Kingdom of God as proclaimed in the synoptic gospels was both an existing concept in Judaism, specifically Second Temple Judaism, and also a "new" concept in

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<sup>1</sup>Wolfhart Pannenberg, *Theology and the Kingdom of God* (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1969), 55.

Christianity that proclaims the future hope of God's rule and the present reality of His influence and rule on earth. These unified-separate concepts have implications for those modern people who seek to follow God in the way of Jesus as individuals and communities.

The first chapter will examine the "Kingdom of God" as a biblical concept with roots in the Old Testament. Psalms will be a case study to show what the kingdom was in Jewish thought up to the time of Jesus. The appearance of the "kingdom theme" is as large as the Bible itself, and to determine a "pre-Jesus kingdom" will show that Jesus was not the only source of teaching on the Kingdom, which is to say that the content of the message Jesus shared did not begin with his earthly teaching and ministry. The Kingdom message's content holds broad historic and theological significance not to be assimilated into the ultimate fact that Jesus died for the sins of the world. The Life of Jesus shared and showed the message of the Kingdom of God not only by his death but also in his life before the cross. To what extent is the *message* of the Kingdom of God which Jesus "Proclaimed" evident in the contemporary church worldwide? To what extent is the message of the atoning death of Jesus proclaimed in contemporary church as a whole? Jesus (the Proclaimer) revealed the pure content of the "Proclaimed" message, and this chapter will delve into the content of the message. In the next chapter I will examine Jesus' theology of the Kingdom of God recorded in the Gospels. As a further explanation, I will exegetically explore Jesus' message of "The Kingdom." The conclusion of the next chapter will explore and discuss the implications of Jesus' Kingdom message on those seeking to follow him as part of the twenty-first century *ecclesia*. The final chapter will explore salvation as a necessary component of the biblical message. The entire study

will attempt to identify and address a vital separation in the contemporary church and seek to encourage those seeking to follow God in the way of Christ in the twenty-first century.

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# 1

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## What Jesus Knew: The Kingdom of God Before Jesus

To gain a better understanding of the “layers” of the Kingdom of God, let us begin to examine the concept as it existed before the historical Jesus walked the earth: what Jesus would have learned and known growing up as a Jewish boy in the first century CE. The Psalms existed as an essential part of influential literature for Second Temple Judaism (or Early Judaism) surrounding the “Kingdom of God” and its influence, though the Psalms were not an official part of the Torah. This period of “Early Judaism” existed from the second century BCE to the second century CE and therefore was present before the historical Jesus walked the earth.

The book of The Psalms, as at present constituted in the O.T., was the hymnbook of the Second Temple. Its rich devotional songs were also sung in private gatherings for the worship of God (Matt 26:30). In his

final agony on the cross Jesus supported himself with words from the Psalter (Psalms 22:1; 31:5).<sup>2</sup>

Exploring the Kingdom of God as it existed before Jesus, one learns the biblical concept is not built beginning in the New Testament solely by the words of Jesus, nor is the Kingdom of God uniquely prescribed historically by the person Jesus of Nazareth. This pre-Jesus period is one of the pieces that will contribute to the full mosaic of the Kingdom.

### *When is the Kingdom*

Before addressing the question, "What is the Kingdom?" it is beneficial to ask the question, "When is the Kingdom?" Jesus is recorded to have said, "Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand."<sup>3</sup> Has the Kingdom left earth with the body of Jesus? Is the Kingdom held as an eschatological hope to be revealed in the future? Can the Kingdom be seen on earth today in the twenty-first century? The Psalms are a guide to these questions. The Psalms portray the kingdom as so near that it is present and yet held to be in the future in regards to a full revelation (96:10):

Say among the nations that the Lord reigns.

The world is established, so as not to move

He will judge the peoples with equity.

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<sup>2</sup> "The Psalms," in *The New Westminster Dictionary of the Bible*, ed. Henry Snyder Gehman (Philadelphia: The Westminster Press, 1970), 772-775.

<sup>3</sup> Matt 3:2



*When is God's rule and kingdom?* The answer is held in the tension of two replies: temporality and ultimacy; "that of which one can be aware and that which one can only anticipate."<sup>4</sup> The student need not toil to choose one or the other. "The future crowns what is now, just as what is now sets the throne for hope in the future."<sup>5</sup> This tension must be kept in mind while exploring the dimensions of the kingdom. The first kingdom one sees in the Bible is that of David and Solomon; therefore, the present reality of a God-centered earthly Kingdom has been actualized and is not only a mystical future hope. However, the people of God did not abandon YHWH when the first kingdom disappeared.

While Jesus was most immediately influenced by intertestamental interpretations of the kingdom of God simply because that is the chronological ground from which his ideas would have grown, he would have also been a student of the older writings and therefore older ideas of the kingdom. The Torah was "lived out" in the polytheistic reality of the ancient Near East in which the power of a king was found in the power of the god(s) the country worshipped. "Armies fought not just for political gain, but for the honor and power of their god as well."<sup>6</sup> Israel's practical ideas concerning the reign of YHWH existed within the dominant intermingled views of "church" and "state"; hence, the land that Israel received was the result of God's power over other gods and therefore

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<sup>4</sup> Bruce Chilton, *Pure Kingdom: Jesus' Vision of God* (Grand Rapids, MI; William B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1996), 34.

<sup>5</sup> Chilton, *Pure Kingdom*, 34.

<sup>6</sup> Steven M. Sheely, "Kingdom of God," in *Eerdmans' Dictionary of the Bible*, ed. David Noel Freedman, Allen C. Myers and Astrid B. Beck (Grand Rapids MI, William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2000), 767.

over other lands and peoples which YHWH had created in the first place. The existence of Israel as a state was the manifestation of God's power which was his reign showing his existence among the people of the earth.

The Davidic Covenant said that the royal line of David would continue because of God's power and rule; however, the Babylonian exile presented a serious theological problem. Those following YHWH at this time lived in the reality of the absence of a literal Kingdom and therefore began to develop abstract boundaries of the Kingdom instead of redefining the unchallengeable character of an omnipotent God. Without the security of God's visible reign on earth to show His ultimate power, "apocalyptic ideas began to emerge."<sup>7</sup> The kingdom now resided in a future hope instead of a present reality: "the hope of an earthly king who would reestablish both the rule of God on earth and the line of David in Judah who would be the 'anointed one' or 'messiah' who would bring about the kingdom of God in the last days...and those who occupied the land, the oppressors, would be driven off and destroyed."<sup>8</sup> The religio-political context in which Jesus was raised and taught affected his ideas of the Kingdom.

The kingdom theme is evident in Jewish writings. The immediacy in the Jewish expectation for an earthly kingdom is clear through the Old Testament. The national desire for a king was "prompted by unbelief and therefore was rebellion against Yahweh, yet it was not in itself at variance with the theocracy and the invisible rule of the Lord...Israel needed a centralized government, if the nation was to endure and maintain

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<sup>7</sup> Sheely, "Kingdom," 768,

<sup>8</sup> Sheely, "Kingdom," 768

its identity.”<sup>9</sup> Therefore the existence of a human king was not inherently contradictory to the rule of God. The hope was for a king ruling over a kingdom of such size and power that it would bear witness to the supreme power of the God which Israel worshipped. One can see the transition from an earthly kingdom to an everlasting kingdom if the earthly presence and rule of the almighty Lord did not exist as the people wished it would.

### *Where is the Kingdom*

In Psalm 145, it is hoped that every part of creation will come to acknowledge and experience the kingdom (vv. 10-13):

All your works shall give thanks to you, O LORD,  
 And all your faithful shall bless you.  
 They shall speak of the glory of your kingdom,  
 And tell of your power,  
 To make known to all people your mighty deeds  
 And the glorious splendor of your kingdom  
 Your kingdom is an everlasting kingdom,  
 And your dominion endures throughout all generations.

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<sup>9</sup> “The Psalms,” *The New Westminster Dictionary of the Bible*, 537.

Psalm 145 anticipates a universal acknowledgment of the kingdom and continues to say the Lord upholds all who are falling, raises up all who are bowed down, and nourishes everything (v. 14-16). The Lord is kind and faithful in everything (v. 17), near and responsive to all who call on him in truth and watches over all who love him (vv.19-20). God is involved and reigns by the means of his kingdom established in his power. "The kingdom known locally [in the Psalms] is to be praised everywhere. Psalms that articulate...transcendence stress that the kingdom is a matter of dynamic power in the universe and in people's experience."<sup>10</sup> The kingdom is not to be an ideal; it is to be effectual and operative in the world. God's limitless power must therefore bring a kingdom that is limitless if the power of God is truly His rule. The kingdom necessarily is to be everywhere and for all because of the grandeur and power of God. The mystery that arises is that there are "those who would not acknowledge the kingdom. But for every instance of such resistance, there is more power to come, until all flesh will celebrate the source of its being."<sup>11</sup> When one reads in the Bible of a God that will judge, the assertion may not be of an ultimate verdict but instead of an absolute rule coming from the absolute power of God. Absolute power prevails absolutely and ultimately in the mind of the Psalmist.

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<sup>10</sup> Chilton, *Pure Kingdom*, 35.

<sup>11</sup> Chilton, *Pure Kingdom*, 35

### *How is the Kingdom?*

To focus the question, an active verb replaces the stative: how *does* the Kingdom happen here one earth? The kingdom is meant to exist everywhere now and yet remain a future eschatological hope to impact peoples' experiences in effective ways. In the Kingdom "judgment" must be present in actuality or in hope because evil in this world must be overcome if God's power is to affect all of creation as the essence of the kingdom. According to Psalm 10, the justification of the meek, the orphans and the oppressed requires those who do evil to be "judged" and brought under the rule of God. "[The wicked] murder the innocent...they lurk that they may seize the poor; they seize the poor and drag them off in their net...the helpless fall by their might"(vv.8-11). The psalmist appeals to God's character, asking Him to reverse injustice and act as a sovereign king (v. 16). "Although God's elimination of the wicked is a common coordinate of his kingdom, the Psalms reveal a variety of understandings concerning who and what were to be eliminated."<sup>12</sup> The Psalms focus in different ways upon the theme of judgment. One may concentrate upon the vindication of those who are oppressed (103:6), while another may foretell or beg for the righting of the wicked (97:6). Just as the essence of the kingdom is found both now and in the future, so too the essence of this judgment must be held in the tension between liberating those who are bound and changing the ways or the effects of the anti-Kingdom workers. "The definition, nature, and timing of judgment are all matters that need to be specified by whoever speaks of the

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<sup>12</sup> Chilton, *Pure Kingdom*, 37

kingdom.”<sup>13</sup> However, one must not be too certain how the judgment of the Lord will change the world:

[The Lord says] “I hate, I despise your festivals, and I take no delight in your solemn assemblies. Even though you offer me your burnt offerings and grain offerings, I will not accept them and the offerings of well-being of your fatted animals I will not look upon. Take away from me the noise of your songs; I will not listen to the melody of your harps. But let justice roll down like waters, and righteousness like an ever-flowing stream.”<sup>14</sup>

At the time Amos wrote this concerning Israel, the country had attained “a height of territorial expansion and national prosperity never again reached. The military security and economic affluence which characterized this age were taken by many Israelites as signs of the Lord’s special favor that they felt they deserved.”<sup>15</sup> These “judgmental” words show the character of the Lord and calls for the necessary humility in dealing with this kingdom theme.

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<sup>13</sup> Chilton, *Pure Kingdom*, 37

<sup>14</sup> Amos 5:21-24

<sup>15</sup> Gene M. Tucker, “Amos” in *The New Oxford Annotated Bible*, ed. Bruce M. Metzger and Roland E. Murphy (New York; Oxford University Press, 1994), 1170.

### *Kingdom Purity*

God's kingdom has many dimensions of which several are established simply by God's character. The next dimension to be discussed is a component of God's character that calls his followers to obedience. Concerning God's judgment, humans can be seen as actors and God as reacting in the Bible. Acknowledging and respectfully ignoring theological debates about an omnipotent God *reacting*, the same reaction can be seen in the psalmists' theme of "purity." What is another avenue through which the kingdom and rule of God might come to earth? Through the pure lives of his followers.

Who shall ascend the hill of the LORD?

And who shall stand in his holy place? (Ps. 24:3)

The psalmist answers his own rhetorical question (vv. 4, 8):

Those who have clean hands and pure hearts,

Who do not lift up their souls to what is false,

And do not swear deceitfully...

Who is the king of glory?

The LORD, strong and mighty.

The one who will have access and blessing from the King of Glory will be the one with clean hands and pure hearts. "In Psalm 24 the point is that purity is affected by one's ethical behavior as well as by the gestures of purification that were conventionally

associated with ascending the mount of the Temple."<sup>16</sup> The Kingdom has been said to be *both* "future" and "now." Judgment can be seen to alter peoples' lives in the present because of future rule and reality. In the same way, purity can be seen as affecting lives in the present because of the ultimate benefits of "ascending the hill" to meet with the Lord. These can be seen as a set of ethics set up by judgment and purity as themes in the Psalms. An individual's life of purity is "a pilgrimage to the shrine where God himself also intends to be a pilgrim."<sup>17</sup> God seeks his to establish his own rule, and people may journey toward pure interaction with the Lord strong and mighty. A pure individual can move toward God with the ultimate expectation that God will respond by revealing his holiness and power. For our study of the kingdom of God affecting the earth this holiness and power are a primary concern. For the person desiring to live in the kingdom of God, the kingdom itself is the end and the means, the source and the goal, the power and the hope. Herein lies the beautiful mystery of the kingdom.

From a biblical-historical view, one can confidently proceed with the assumption that the foundational ideas discussed to this point would have been part of Early Judaism's, and therefore Jesus', ideas pertaining to the kingdom. It is plain to see any one of these characteristics could be (and have been) taken by some to encompass the entire kingdom. In other words, one or more parts would constitute the entirety of the kingdom. If one seeks to follow the way of the Kingdom then to apply only one coordinate described in the chapter does not make a responsible basis for application. Like the Pharisees, if one truly believed that God would show himself most through

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<sup>16</sup> Chilton, *Pure Kingdom*, 39

<sup>17</sup> Chilton, *Pure Kingdom*, 40



purity then the pursuit of purity does not initially require condemnation of and separation from others, but originally purity is the most admirable desire to draw oneself to the divine. If an idealistic young member of the kingdom focuses on "judgment" then he will spend a disproportionate amount of time fighting injustice and the power of "Rome" because that would be the way to show the rule of God.

The next chapter will change only in approach to address Jesus and His role in this scholarly discussion. Jesus' views and actions pertaining to the kingdom of God can be examined by looking at the Synoptic Gospels, specifically Matthew and Luke.

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## 2

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### Jesus and the Kingdom of God

Having looked at the school of thought evident in the Psalms to which Jesus would have been exposed as a first century Jew, we now focus attention upon Jesus himself and the message of the kingdom of God that he proclaimed and practiced as recorded in the Synoptic Gospels. To what degree does the message found in the Psalms coincide with that found in the message of Jesus? The message of Jesus is that which Jesus shared, not the message of "Jesus" himself. "Nothing can at once be more necessary and more legitimate than the endeavor to ascertain by a close study of Christ's words and actions in what sense He used it [the kingdom of God.]"<sup>18</sup> This chapter will focus on the message that Jesus shared concerning the kingdom of God. Jesus' redemptive, salvific work has become a message of the church that will be addressed in the third chapter; however, this chapter will consider what Jesus himself told people regarding the nature of the kingdom of God.

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<sup>18</sup> Alexander Balmain Bruce, *The Kingdom of God: Christ's Teaching According to the Synoptical Gospels* (6<sup>th</sup> ed. New York :Charles Scribner's Sons), 45-46. The context indicates that "it" refers to "the Kingdom of God."

### *Pick Your Audience*

Many scholars throughout history have made careers debating "kingdom issues." The same words can be taken to mean different things by different people. However, the beginning of the present study is based upon inferences that depend not only on the words spoken but the people about and to whom they were shared. One can see exposed the faulty over-emphasis of kingdom themes such as "purity" by the Pharisees or "judgment" by the political activists when the chosen audience is noticed. "Jesus answered... 'the blind receive their sight, the lame walk, the lepers are cleansed, the deaf hear, the dead are raised, and the poor have good news brought to them'" (Matt. 11:5). "[Jesus] said, '...For I have come to call not the righteous but sinners'" (Matt. 9:13). "The Son of Man came to seek out and to save the lost." (Luke 19:10). While the message is yet undefined, the intended audience is clearer.

Does the kind of message that repeatedly comes from Jesus to his audience find a home in the contemporary churches that seek to be grounded in these biblical principles? In the same way in which the hope of a king for Israel changed from a physical "now" message after the Exile, so too the message of the kingdom finds its home in the future when an unforeseen reality causes God's followers to reevaluate God's promises. The message of Jesus was the blind receiving sight and the poor having good news brought to them. When that kingdom message is not realized, the kingdom *must* not be here (is the assumption), and the church is left with hope for the future instead of a practical call to change the world. Hope shifts to the future, and those who could be sharing the message of Jesus (which is to say 'share the message which Jesus shared') begin to share the

message of Jesus, which is to say 'share the message that the son of God died for our eternal salvation.'

*When is Jesus' Kingdom?*

John Crossan claims that Jesus rejected apocalyptic eschatology (the main component of the Kingdom message being that of a future-based message of hope) and that one should understand him in terms of a "kingdom performed rather than just proclaimed."<sup>19</sup> Jesus held and taught (as described in the Psalms) a future vision of the kingdom as well as put forth an applicable social program. In Chapter 1, "that of which one can be aware and that which one can only anticipate"<sup>20</sup> is the unity of the message not the dichotomy. The message of Jesus does not leave those seeking to follow solely in a state of anticipation.<sup>21</sup> Future hope places a call just as an ultimate hope appears in the midst of the temporary call. "The accent of Jesus' message differed from Jewish eschatological hope [of his era] at precisely this point: Jesus underscored the *present impact* of the imminent future."<sup>22</sup> The present is not independent of the future for Jesus.

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<sup>19</sup> John Dominic Crossan, *The Historical Jesus: The Life of a Mediterranean Jewish Peasant* (San Francisco: HarperSan Francisco, 1991), 259.

<sup>20</sup> Bruce Chilton, *Pure Kingdom: Jesus' Vision of God* (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1996), 34.

<sup>21</sup> It seems that the teachings of future hope are most applied and spread when present truth does not line up with anticipated realities. Heaven is comfort for those being persecuted. The coming Day of Judgment is hope for those being oppressed. However, when "times are good" why does the follower not cling to the message of the Kingdom to the degree that he grasps the teachings of eternal peace in heaven during times of struggle? This is a practical theological question that is not in the scope of this study but the author wishes to note is important.

Jesus received his message from the Jewish hope for the future Kingdom of God with which he balanced the present impact of the kingdom. To say that Jesus was a revolutionary in his thinking about the kingdom is less accurate than to say that he was a traditionalist returning to the prayer book of the Psalms to learn his lessons.

Jesus was a student of the story of God's interaction with his people. He was a student of the prophets and writings esteemed by Second Temple Judaism. Jesus was not concerned with disregarding the Old Story. "The two testaments are organically linked to each other. The relationship between them is neither one of upward development nor of contrast; it is one of...hope and fulfillment."<sup>23</sup> The link between them is not judgment, purity, divine-human interaction or apocalyptic projection, though those are all present. John Bright offers applicable words, "And the bond that binds [the testaments] together is the dynamic concept of the rule of God."<sup>24</sup> People looked to interpret the Kingdom of God in different ways depending on their situation: intertestamental Israel did not see a physical king, so they looked for the coming of an ultimate final king. In the New Testament we encounter a change: The Kingdom is *here*! "And that is a very 'new thing' indeed: it is gospel."<sup>25</sup>

If Jesus is the Messiah, then he has come to "make actual the victorious rule of God over his people which Israel's faith had long awaited."<sup>26</sup> From Chapter 1, we know what

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<sup>22</sup> Pannenberg, *Theology and the Kingdom of God*, 59.

<sup>23</sup> John Bright, *The Kingdom of God*, (Abingdon-Cokesbury Press: New York, 1953), 196.

<sup>24</sup> Bright, *Kingdom*, 197

<sup>25</sup> Bright, *Kingdom*, 197

“corners” the shape of the kingdom would have; however, the New Testament claim that Jesus has established the kingdom on earth calls one to ask how he has done so, or to put it, differently, What is his kingdom? After determining what his kingdom is by looking at his words, we will then move to examine the results of Jesus’ initial establishment and how to act that out in the contemporary church.

*What is within the kingdom?*

A kingdom (and possibly its power) in general can be defined in many ways: by geographical boundaries, by the king himself or by the people of the kingdom. The latter two will reveal the Kingdom of God to be a kingdom with God as the king but also a kingdom God created: namely His people. If the Kingdom of God has entered the world, then men are called to the service of that Kingdom: both its king and its people. He rules over people; he calls people to his rule: subjective and objective.

At times the kingdom of God is a place that one “enters” (Matt 19:23) and where people share meals (Matt 8:11). At times it is an entity that “belongs” to certain people (the poor, Luke 6:20), that can be “given” (Luke 12:32) and “received” (Luke 18:17), and that can be subjected to violence (Matt 11:12). It is also the subject of verbs of movement: it “comes near” (Luke 10:9) or “comes upon” a person when demons are expelled (Mark 12:28). Moreover, Jesus suggested some aspect of it by comparing it with ordinary situations such as seedling (Mark 4:26-29) and putting leaven into bread dough (Matt 13:33), just as he used an extraordinary situation such as finding buried

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<sup>26</sup> Bright, *Kingdom*, 216

treasure (Matt 13:44) to suggest the proper response to its realization. What types of inferences can be made from information such as this? What is the significance of Jesus' call to the kingdom? Because of the relative frequency with which the message of forgiveness appears, a student of the contemporary church may believe that Jesus taught solely that message. Is this the dominant message shared by Jesus during his life?

Before examining the words of Christ, let us look at the implications of those words; let us define their significance. The significance of Jesus' mission was not merely to show people a system by which to be better people. His was the call for a "radical decision for that Kingdom. Who will say yes to its coming? It stands at the door and knocks, who will open the door and let it in?" (Luke 12:36, Rev 3:20)<sup>27</sup> Those who hear the invitation and "who heed it have entered the kingdom, nay, are the Kingdom."<sup>28</sup> How do these two teachings of the church seem almost to be opposites: 1) Jesus died for the forgiveness of sins, and 2) Jesus preached the Kingdom of God which calls for radical obedience and forsaking human "safety" to live an eternal kind of life? The message of Jesus and the message of "Jesus" need not divide the church; however, the divisions are a present reality. The roots of the separation within the church and separation from the whole of biblical teaching need to be exposed and rendered lifeless.

In any event, it is repeatedly insisted in the Gospels that the members of Christ's Kingdom are those that obey him. Christ's own are those who have fed the hungry, clothed the naked, shown mercy to the

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<sup>27</sup> Bright, *Kingdom*, 219

<sup>28</sup> Bright, *Kingdom*, 220

prisoner and outcast—who have, in short, done the works of Christ.<sup>29</sup>

The whole “body of Christ” (the worldwide church) needs not neglect the teachings of radical obedience to endorse the salvific work of Christ and vice versa. Both options are dangerous. “Some share attempts to see kingdom of God in the teachings of Jesus as encompassing all of the work of Christ, from his earthly ministry, through an interim time, and culminating in a triumphal return to rule and judge.”<sup>30</sup>

The significance and implications of the Kingdom of God, which to this point has been left undefined, are great in the life of contemporary church. The call from Jesus is not one of only future hope but of obedience; Jesus expected his followers to take this call of the kingdom seriously in all generations. “The call to the kingdom of the New Testament is like the ethical demands of the Old Covenant, in this fact: they are the means by which men show that they are the true people of God’s kingdom. If obedience is not given, in New Covenant as in Old, then ‘you are not my people (Hos 1:9).’”<sup>31</sup> This is the apex of social gospel and the gospel of individual salvation that will be examined further both in the next chapter and the conclusion. Such is the significance of the kingdom of God.

Those who criticize Christians have rarely found imperfection in Christians who *are* disciples of Jesus from their point of view, but rather accused them with not being his disciples and betraying his cause. The life of Jesus is not limited to what he said, but also

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<sup>29</sup> Bright, *Kingdom*, 220. Matt 25: 31-46.

<sup>30</sup> Eerdman’s, *KOG*, 768

<sup>31</sup> Bright, *Kingdom*, 223



what he did and believed (as much as can be inferred). Those who might base the contemporary church more on the Kingdom of God and social action would hold as a credo, "Jesus taught us how to live." Many who dislike organized Christianity can respect what Jesus said while not appreciating those who have sought and continue to seek "to live as a follower of Jesus." Living a life that is affected by the kingdom of God means 'living now by what is not yet manifest but impending; as a result one is out of step with those elements in the present that are destined to be abandoned or changed when the kingdom is manifestly here':<sup>32</sup> namely those foundations discussed in chapter one.

The kingdom and the "corners" which outline it require a complete decision and commitment. This commitment Jesus compared to a man who sells everything to buy a field in which he had found a treasure or the pearl merchant who sold everything to buy the one pearl of great value (Matt 13:44-46). Family responsibility is ignored (Luke 9:57-62). Living by and living for the kingdom is a demand for obedience and application of Jesus' life in his followers'. Either one understands the kingdom and is willing to sell all one has to buy the field, or one has not been grasped by and entered into the kingdom and will not react obediently. Is this true in the modern church? The ethics of Jesus have invaded and influenced the Western worldview; however, if one does not understand the kingdom behind the words and actions of Jesus, then they simply comprise a moral code that can focus attention on the deed instead of the doer. "Did not Jesus shift the focus from the deed to the doer when he suggested that adultery occurs in

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<sup>32</sup> Keck, *Who is Jesus?* 154

the lustful heart before it occurs in the bed?"<sup>33</sup> Jesus is concerned with the doer "before" the deed (theologically and chronologically). The nature of Jesus' call is not based on "right" and "wrong," but also by the interactions he had (or inferences we can make "between the lines"): "Jesus' demeanor, his way of responding to situations, his way of being engaged, determines the kind of influence he has."<sup>34</sup>

In summary, the life Jesus lived was fused with the kingdom, not only his words. What is the kingdom then? It can be viewed in the life and teachings of Jesus. He is concerned with the doer and then the deed but may access the deed to get to the doer as in the case of the rich young ruler. Although the Beatitudes and other expressions of God's grace are as hard to assimilate as the stern sayings that point to the utter seriousness of the present, both summon the follower to keep reshaping one's moral life until it reflects more clearly and deeply the Jesus event and its vision."<sup>35</sup>

The church might learn from itself to say that focusing on simply the social ethics of the Kingdom of God, as many have done, preaching the ethics of Jesus and leaving aside his person and work as if it were awkward and superfluous theological baggage is not to be fully the church. Nor can the church leave out Jesus' call to radical, earth-changing obedience, as those who focus on the redemptive work of Christ have tended to do. They have done so while sneering at the "activists" for not preaching a full gospel but instead urging people to salvation through faith and feeling no need even to confront

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<sup>33</sup> Keck, *Who is Jesus?* 158

<sup>34</sup> Keck, *Who is Jesus*, 160

<sup>35</sup> Keck, *Who is Jesus*, 175

the church with the glorious demands of the Kingdom. Neither has fully wrestled with the humble King of salvation.

We have not two gospels, social and personal, which vie for limelight. We have one gospel, the gospel of the Kingdom of God, and it is both. We have simply nothing else to preach. Let us be sure that we are summoned to obey it in all our dealing within the church and also beyond that church wherever we meet our brother. To present the Christian gospel merely as a program of social righteousness is fundamentally to mistake the Christ of the Gospels and to tread a path of frustration and disillusionment. For a non-Christian world will not put into practice the ethics of Christ and cannot, for all our chiding, be made to do so. To realize the ethics of the kingdom it is first necessary that men submit to the rule of that Kingdom.<sup>36</sup>

The essence of this dualistically unified message is not found in choosing up sides, which is to say defining oneself by what another is not, but instead to plunge the depths of "being the church" which requires humility in front of God and humans. Just as an individual believer is not called to inherit saving faith as if it were a nationality (one is Christian because they attend a service at a certain church), so too then the church is not called to inherit its gospel from those who came before. The gospel must be realized and acted upon in the church. Just as an individual believer is not called to a life of isolation, enjoying the future hope of heaven, so too an individual church is not called to live

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<sup>36</sup> Bright, *Kingdom*, 222-223

within the walls of that building. The individual believer is to be where God can call out His transformation and affect the world, so too the individual church is to be where the hope of change within the community lies. The irresponsible way to resolve the tension is to focus on the individual and his/her salvation while neglecting the community for which Jesus calls. It is to focus on the life of an individual church while neglecting the call to change the world by means of the unified church. It is to focus on modes of salvation while missing the diagnostic fruits of saved life.

If obedience is not given, in New Covenant as in Old, then "you are not my people (Hos 1:9)." Exactly here is the relationship of social gospel to gospel of individual salvation<sup>37</sup>

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<sup>37</sup> Bright, *Kingdom*, 223

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## Salvation in Conversation

*The Son of man came to seek and save the lost. Luke 19:10*

Having examined and discussed the Kingdom of God, we now turn the focus to a different biblical theme, namely salvation. Holding tightly to that which was discussed and discovered in the previous two chapters, we turn to the biblical (and more specifically New Testament) concept of salvation as one of the most discussed, most disagreed upon and most important themes in the Bible. The following text need not break down every denominational or personal barrier built by many hundreds of years or more of disagreement. I seek to plunge to the heart of "salvation" without addressing the exhaustively discussed "means" to salvation. The way to salvation will be assumed (for the sake of stepping around a topic which is not directly in the scope of this study). This chapter will seek to take a step towards comprehending the breadth and length and height

and depth of God's salvation and seek to *know* the love of Christ.<sup>38</sup> To discern the essence of salvation for the purpose of encouraging the church's introspection, the following study will examine briefly what salvation is not, what it is to Paul (and possibly other New Testament personnel), what has brought salvation and what it means for those who base contemporary church life on it.

The thematic scope of 'salvation' in the Bible is too large to take for granted. A brief language study will open the door. In Old Testament Hebrew "salvation" is used to translate different words, most importantly those from the root *yod-shin-aiyn*. Some hold that the Hebrew root has roots in Arabic with a basic meaning of "to be broad," "to become spacious," "to enlarge," and carries the connotation of deliverance.<sup>39</sup> Others hold that *yod-shin-aiyn* and related words have Proto-Semitic origins and have nothing to do with this definition.<sup>40</sup> This root implies "bringing help to those in trouble rather than rescuing them from it...like a light (Isa 49:6) or like walls and ramparts round a beleaguered city (Isa 26:1) and does not remove or rescue them from it."<sup>41</sup> This insight assists us in thinking of the Kingdom of God and the ethics Jesus presented in a more-than-ethical way in light of the concept of salvation. The proper name of Jesus is from the root *yod-shin-aiyn* (which is *Ἰησους* in Greek; Acts 7:45, Matt 1:21, 25). Another

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<sup>38</sup> Eph 3:18

<sup>39</sup> W. W. Muller, "Altsudarabische Beitrage zum hebraischen Lexikon," ZAW, 75 (1963), 310.

<sup>40</sup> *Theological Dictionary of the Old Testament*, ed. G. Johnaas Botterweck and Helmer Ringgren, translated by David E. Green, Vol. VI (Grand Rapids, Michigan; William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1990), 442.

<sup>41</sup> *Theological Dictionary*, 446.

word in Hebrew to which our attention will be given is *gimmel-aleph-lamed*, translated: to redeem, to recover property which had fallen into other hands, to purchase back (e.g., from slavery), to deliver, to save. This type of salvation is seen as deliverance from adversity, oppression, death, and captivity (Egyptian, Babylonian).<sup>42</sup> It is unusual in the Old Testament to find redemption from sin (Ps 130:8 is an exception). "It is especially in Deutero-Isaiah that YHWH himself is represented as Israel's *go'el*" (Isa. 41:14, 43:14; 44:6, 24).<sup>43</sup>

In New Testament Greek, *sigma-omega-zeta-epsilon-iota-nu* occurs more than one hundred times. Half of those occur in the Gospels. Of them, fourteen refer to deliverance from disease or demon-possession. About twenty gospel uses refer to rescue from physical peril or death (Matt 8:25, 14:30; Mark 3:4, 15:30-31). The remaining twenty uses in the Gospels refer to theological or religious salvation. The "new" feature of Jesus' doctrine of salvation is that it is for sinners. "Those who are well have no need of a physician, but those who are sick; I came not to call the righteous, but sinners" (Mark 2:17).<sup>44</sup> "The tax collectors and harlots go into the kingdom of God before you" (Matt 21:31, Luke 14:16-24). "Your faith has saved you" (Luke 7:50). Jesus' conversation reveals that this comment is woven together with "your sins are forgiven" (v 48). Salvation means the forgiveness of sins, reconciliation with God, and the peace which flows from it: "your faith has saved you; go in peace" (v. 50). Repentance is the condition of salvation and reconciliation, as is shown with Zacchaeus: "Today salvation

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<sup>42</sup> Alan Richardson, "Salvation" in *The Interpreter's Dictionary of the Bible*, ed. Buttrick, et. al (Abingdon Press, New York, 1962) vol. IV, 168

<sup>43</sup> Richardson, "Salvation," 169.

has come to this house" (Luke 19:19). "Hence the mission of Jesus, whose *object* is salvation is closely bound up with the forgiveness of sins."<sup>45</sup> According to Luke, Jesus saw his mission in terms of Isaiah's servant's work, "He has sent me to proclaim release to the captives...to set at liberty those who are oppressed" (Luke 4:18, Isa 61:1).

Humanity is saved by the birth, life, death, resurrection, and ascension of Jesus Christ: the whole event. "It is the life of Christ that saved us; but it is natural that, in the metaphors of salvation which are based upon Jewish sacrificial ideas and practices, it should be said that we are saved by his death."<sup>46</sup> Jesus is the Christian Passover lamb (I Cor 5:7). In the New Testament and the church the death of Christ has been seen as the means of salvation, but that death was always regarded as a moment in the whole act of deliverance. This holistic act of Jesus, not only on the cross, but in his life, death and resurrection has been forgotten by those who emphasize the individual's salvation. The whole event of Jesus' life is the culmination of God's loving act of salvation and deliverance and therefore that which Christians should follow. The implication is that there can be no *individual* salvation. Just as the death of Christ can be seen to indicate the moment when all the sins of the world were forgiven, so too the life of Jesus and his radical actions and teachings must also be seen as the moment when the sins of the world were forgiven. One cannot separate the life of Christ into "moments of implication" such as the moment of his death being for forgiveness, the moments of his miracles showing his power, the moments of his "teaching" being the only words to imitate in contemporary life. Therefore to rid ourselves of sin (the desire of purity; see discussion

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<sup>45</sup> Richardson, "Salvation," 169.

<sup>46</sup> Richardson, "Salvation," 179.



in Chapter 1) and realize the impact God may have on lives, one need not only come to the cross but also come to the well to meet the woman, come to the feast to meet the boy with the loaves and fishes, come to the garden to rely and pray, come out at night to meet Nicodemus, come to find a treasure in a field and joyfully sell all to buy that field.<sup>47</sup> "By grace you have been saved through faith."<sup>48</sup>

The perfect tense shows that, as far as the salvation of the individual Christian is concerned, it is an event which has taken place at a particular and definite moment in his past history. The view would accord with the theological outlook of the apostolic church, that, whereas the death of Christ upon Calvary represents the baptism of humanity as a whole into the sphere of salvation, the moment of the death to sin, or resurrection to salvation of the individual believer is his baptism into Christ's church [kingdom].<sup>49</sup>

Therefore for individual salvation, one does not re-member only with the death of Christ. Jesus Christ died once and for all. For one's own forgiveness of sin and salvation, to remember with Jesus only at his death on the cross is to crucify the infant Jesus, disregarding the life he lived and the demands to obedience he made. One must encounter the living Jesus fully in the present and in his historical life and call to obedience knowing that the message of Jesus is part of a message which has not changed.

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<sup>47</sup> Matt 13:44

<sup>48</sup> Eph 2:8

<sup>49</sup> Richardson, "Salvation," 180

No individualism is present in the New Testament concept of salvation. All the metaphors are corporate in character—the Israel of God, the elect, the body of Christ, the communion of saints, the fellowship of the Holy Spirit, the messianic banquet, the kingdom of God, the church...the new creation.<sup>50</sup>

“Few have recognized the hidden selfishness in such a radically individualistic conception of salvation.”<sup>51</sup> The Christ event took place for a purpose and was needed. It was the loving expression of a just God to open a new access to Himself. The death and resurrection did create the realm of a new Kingdom into which one might walk and live as an individual in a community who is part of a larger community. A lovely portion of the gift of salvation is the purity found in the absence of sin made possible by the redeeming work of Christ is But then “how can I speak of my [salvation] as a Christian if my neighbor likewise is not becoming a Christian?”<sup>52</sup>

### *Salvation in Paul's Writings and the Implications*

Having looked at the Synoptic Gospels for much of the biblical basis of these ideas thus far we now turn to Paul, his writing and the implications for the church today. The following can be seen as the essence of Paul's writings:

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<sup>50</sup> Richardson, “Salvation,” 181

<sup>51</sup> Clark, *Saved*, 202

<sup>52</sup> Clark, *Saved*, 204

Do you not know that all of us who have been baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into his death? Therefore we have been buried with him by baptism into death, so that, just as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, so we too might walk in newness of life. For if we have been united with him in a death like his, we will certainly be united with him in a resurrection like his. We know that our old self was crucified with him so that the body of sin might be destroyed, and we might no longer be enslaved to sin. For whoever has died with Christ, we believe that we will also live with him. We know that Christ, being raised from the dead, will never die again; death no longer has dominion over him. The death he died, he died to sin, once for all, but the life he lives, he lives to God. So you also must consider yourselves dead to sin and alive to God in Christ Jesus.<sup>53</sup>

The reality Paul is describing is of ultimate concern to anyone seeking to follow God in the way of Christ and live an eternal kind of life now with the hope of an eternal life after this. Paul's writing and legacy cause one to know about the high and glorious work of the Christ event: the death and resurrection. The eschatological reality of Paul's teachings is evident and hopeful; however, one must encounter Paul in our contemporary setting and more specifically in our contemporary church. Has the ultimacy Paul finds in the death and resurrection overshadowed the life Jesus lived? In the opinions and experience of

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<sup>53</sup> Romans 6:3-11

this author, the legacy of Paul focuses on the eschatological realities over the present "Kingdom" demands.

Paul describes the reality of the salvific work of Jesus Christ and its eternal and ultimate significance but does not hold the cross-resurrection to be the whole of the salvific work.

But God proves his love for us in that while we were sinners Christ died for us. Much more surely then, now that we have been justified by his blood, will be saved through him from the wrath of God. For if while we were enemies we were reconciled to God through the death of his Son, much more surely, having been reconciled, will we be saved by his life.<sup>54</sup>

This life is not only the earthly life of Jesus (his teachings, ministry, etc.), nor is it solely the resurrection life of the risen Christ. It is both as one. "Paul clearly uses *zoe*, 'life,' and related forms to refer to present, earthly existence (Rom 5:10, etc.)."<sup>55</sup> This word denotes "physical vitality of organic beings. 'Life' is understood...as vitality, as the nature or *manner* which characterizes living things. *Zoe* (life) has limited extension in time."<sup>56</sup> This indicates that the "life" of which Paul speaks may not be the eternal life of the risen Christ but instead the actual earthly life of Jesus. "As Christ for Paul is not an

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<sup>54</sup> Romans 5:9-11

<sup>55</sup> Rudolf Bultmann, "Life" in *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament*, ed. Geoffrey W. Bromiley (Grand Rapids, MI; Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1964), 867

<sup>56</sup> Bultman, "Life," 867

idea or a cosmic force, so *zoe* for him is not a hyperphysical state, but present historical actuality..."<sup>57</sup> Webster defines "vitality" (used above) as "power of enduring; capacity for survival."<sup>58</sup> This power of enduring is found in not only in the ultimate resurrected life of Jesus but also in the actual earthly life he lived. The resurrected Christ needs no means for survival but the message he shared does need a means for survival: his followers. Although Paul's legacy can be characterized by the first passage, the intricacy found in this passage is endorsing exactly the type of salvation that we have been discussing. Since the crucifixion of Jesus, all those who encounter the message of God's loving involvement with humans converge upon a reality that has already happened. Jesus *has* died. He does not "re-die" for every individual who comes to faith in His life and message. The act has happened. It is a past event in the past tense never to be repeated. "And it is by God's will that we have been sanctified through the offering of the body of Jesus Christ *once for all*."<sup>59</sup>

Those entering into faith in the life of Christ encounter a pre-existent state of reconciliation into which one can enter (for sake of conceptualization) which Christ (who died and created a "realm" of justification free from the wrath of God) established. Before anyone who needed this justification knew they needed it (or in most cases, before that person was born), Jesus died and provided reconciliation; however, the "realm" of reconciliation, having already been established once and for all, must be entered by

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<sup>57</sup> Bultman, "Life," 867

<sup>58</sup> "Vitality" in *Webster's 3<sup>rd</sup> New International Dictionary*, ed. Philip Babcock Gove (Springfield, Mass.; Meriam Webster Incorporated, 1993), 2558

<sup>59</sup> Hebrews 10:10

individuals through the means of the *life* Jesus lived and the involvement God has in lives *now*. Paul also enters this discussion. However, Paul's legacy and interpreters may contribute to a more one sided view of personal salvation. The intent of Paul is not to endorse one side of the spectrum proposed to this point. Paul did not intend to inspire a lack of obedience to the radical teachings of Jesus, which is to say His life in order to endorse only the resurrection life. Though many have chosen to use Paul to back up a contemporary church based more heavily on the doctrine of individual salvation, Paul also sought a gospel to change the world and establish the Kingdom and to involve more in the pre-existent realm of reconciliation with God, which is to say salvation through the entire Jesus event with contemporary significance and living power to change the world.

"Whatever the church may do to spread the gospel, it must resist the temptation of simplifying it in...individualistic terms...We cannot afford to retrogress in regard to the truth."<sup>60</sup> The complex and "intendedly" grueling questions must not be answered with simplistic answers. "The mystery of the human and divine is greater than is surmised in our philosophies. It cannot be measured by the neat formulas to which Christian orthodoxy is frequently reduced, any more than it can be exhausted in even the most elaborate theological systems."<sup>61</sup> The answer is not to choose the teachings of Jesus before the teachings about the resurrection of Jesus or to choose eternal life before an eternal kind of life. The humble answer is to live every day grappling with the Lord as did Jacob. The result of this struggle is that every step taken is taken with a limp from

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<sup>60</sup> Reinhold Niebuhr, "Can the Church Give a Moral Lead?" in *Essays in Applied Christianity* ((Meridan Books, New York, 1959), 131.

<sup>61</sup> Niebuhr, *Can the Church?*, 129

our hips being "put out of joint while wrestling with God,"<sup>62</sup> relying solely on the blessing of the Lord in order to proceed.

The church is a community of "saved" individuals, who know themselves to be "forgiven sinners." This ideal should make for humility; but the long history of religious self-righteousness reveals that religious experience is more effective in inducing repentance for deviation from common standards than in inducing repentance for the hatred, bigotry, and prejudice involved in the common standards of race and nation, or church...The belief in perfectibility has given the religious community too often the aura of self-righteousness.<sup>63</sup>

The humility therefore need not come from having found the death of Jesus and the eternal rewards but in having been found by the life of Jesus: earthly and resurrection. The one who follows God in the way of the Christ need not say, "thy kingdom come, thy will be done on earth as it is in heaven" only to move on in rote memorization to say, "give us this day..." The one who seeks to live a life of obedience to the radical teachings of Jesus needs to find motivation, purpose and humility in the fact that the kingdom is not fully established on earth. The assumption of perfectibility in religious experience leads to an individualistic salvation and an inward-turned faith that is not salvation.

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<sup>62</sup> Genesis 32:25

<sup>63</sup> Reinhold Niebuhr, *Man's Nature and His Communities* (Charles Scribner's Sons, New York, 1965), 112

*Saved Souls*

The predicament of the Christian faith is found in the call for personal commitment to the grace that is not bound by formulas of salvation. How does one then see the work of Billy Graham?

If the evangelistic efforts tempts us to draw pharisaic lines between the righteous and the unrighteous, that is perhaps not so much the fault of the evangelist---particularly if he be as modest as Graham---as it is the dilemma of the Christian faith itself.<sup>64</sup>

One must appreciate the humility and heart of a man (and those similar) such as Billy Graham. However, this recognition does not change the reality that the individualistic approach to commitment, obedience and faith is in danger of marginalizing the intimately complex and ultimately important task of seeking justice in the community.

The unsaved may not have signed a decision card but may have accepted racial equality with greater grace than the saved. We must, in short, bring Christian evangelism and salvation into correspondence with the breadth and complexity of our social obligations...and at the same time into

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<sup>64</sup> Niebuhr, *Can the Church?* 129



conformity with the Biblical truths about the precariousness of the virtues of the redeemed.<sup>65</sup>

While holding fast to the need and reality of salvation, all this must be experienced and attempted without taking away from the commanding call of the gospel upon the experiential reality of the individual, "who transcends every social situation and communal destiny to face the mystery of the divine rule and mercy."<sup>66</sup> The individual soul into which has been breathed the breath of life<sup>67</sup> must not be lost in mass society. However, the community must not be lost in the breath of one redeemed life. Therefore, what is the goal? The humble person who submits, relies, works for and seeks to be an instrument of the divine grace and the ordinary services of the church may have a purer chance of living the redeemed life and presenting the gospel in its full dimension than the professional evangelist or the social activist.<sup>68</sup>

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<sup>65</sup> Neibuhr, *Can the Church?* 129

<sup>66</sup> Neibuhr, *Can the Church?* 129

<sup>67</sup> Genesis 2:6

<sup>68</sup> Neibuhr, *Can the Church?* 129

## *Conclusion*

The church is an existing body and a perfected ideal but not both at once. The perfected ideal is not an existing reality, and the contemporary church need find only this for a practical level of perfection: humility. The modern Roman Catholic Church will not present an argument so brilliant that the Lutherans will deny their reformation roots. The Baptists need not attempt to perfect their arguments in order to prove Presbyterians guilty of practicing false baptism. Humility accesses a place in which discussion need not seek to defend oneself or find fault in another but instead to plunge the depths of intra-church and intra-personal examination before interchurch and interpersonal interaction. The discussion held in the three previous chapters concerning the Kingdom of God and salvation probably will not unify all those seeking to follow God in the way of Christ; those who have been affected by the Kingdom of God and have experienced personal salvation; those who work for the Kingdom of God and have chosen the church as the agent to do that work. However, the logical unification of all parties (in the spirit of this study) need not be my job or motivation. Those seeking to accomplish this task as of yet have failed unless I am uninformed, and I seek not to be another voice calling for unity in the essence of the biblical church. The motivation is this: because of God, I will live eternally in his presence and also seek to lead an eternal kind of life. Because of the atoning death of Jesus, I have been called to share that story with humility and power. Because of the radical life of Jesus, I seek to live a life of radical obedience to His life and message. Concluding this study, this is the essence of church: to live in the tension of both realities (salvation and the Kingdom of God) though it may be more difficult than

picking one or the other and encouraging others (individuals and churches) to do the same and be the Church.

If I am I because you are you, then I am not I and you are not you.

But if I am I because I am I, and you are you because you are you,

Then I am I and you are you.

My experience, faith, hope and love are not "mine" because they are different than another's. The "ultimate" is mine when I access enough humility to realize it independently of others (which is to say those who are "different others") and dependently on God and the church and then live that out. Therefore, my call need not be made with brilliant logic and breathtaking argument but instead with humility, personal God-seeking reflection and a life of radical unsafe obedience that calls others to the same, which is found for myself in the two realities discussed in this study.

Salvation and the Kingdom of God do not independently beg for adherents nor do they pick teams as if church were a game on the elementary school playground. The two concepts do call to stay in the ongoing battle to base life and church on both salvation and the Kingdom of God. What is church? A group of groups of individuals in which God is calling for salvation *and* the Kingdom *through* salvation and the Kingdom at each level: "the gospel of both."

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## Epilogue

The reason I decided to study and write this paper is both academic and personal. The academic side is what I have written to this point. The personal side was the motivation, and I will try to explain briefly the driving force behind a lengthy study.

My life of faith in God began with family and church. I “grew” into a personal faith in understanding and experience. With that growth continuing, the learning and application of my faith has turned largely to issues of the church: how then shall we live, what should we be doing, etc.? Right now a balance of “salvation” and the “kingdom of God” is the most important foundation of practical church modeling. However, this balance has not been inspired by continual exposure to the described balance. In other words, I have journeyed to this place by seeing and experiencing both “salvation” and the “kingdom of God” in the problematic way (as opposites) I have attempted to address in this paper.

Growing up in a protestant church, I was presented many times with the doctrine of personal salvation. This type of salvation was apparent in the New Testament whether

in Paul's conversion or new believers being baptized. Jesus' atoning death on the cross made this type of salvation and experience possible. Jesus died for my sins. I went to camps that "built up" to the last night when people were invited to "ask Jesus into their heart." I have been able to pray with people who have learned of God's love and Jesus' death on the cross and have come to faith in those realities. This is an important part of faith and church. Faith and salvation are not inherited like green eyes or red hair. There is a personal foundation.

At the same time, I grew-up realizing the state of the world in which I was living: famine in Ethiopia, innercity poverty only a few miles away from my comfortable suburb home, children who did not have clothes. Themes like oppression and poverty were *not* simply symbolic of a spiritual reality. The Bible and the church also offered teaching in this arena: feed the hungry, clothe the naked, love your neighbor. Since I was thirteen-years-old, I have been able to go on mission trips to innercity settings and other countries in which I have seen people living in unlivable situations in which I have sought to "help." What role does the church have?

In the past few years, I have been able to interact and observe this "thing" called the church. Some churches seek to save souls: individual salvation and personal forgiveness. I was able to attend a few Billy Graham crusades during which many thousands came to faith in personal ways. They showed this by walking to the front of the arena. A personal experience with a living God has changed the lives of many people I know. This personal salvation seems of ultimate importance at many points in my life; however, after working with a "squatter's village" in Trinidad, living with a poor Christian family in Costa Rica or knowing numerous people living in the poverty of the

innercity, my offering of a prayer or sharing a future hope of heaven seemed a bit trite and impractical. I have worked in innercity Minneapolis for two summers and have grown to know people who do not have money for meals, clothes or shelter, but there have been many more people who knock on the door of the mission, and the only thing I have time to do is give them a sandwich.

In the poorest or most oppression-ridden lives, hot meals or an escape from persecution may not be exactly what people. They might simply need to know Jesus or to be encouraged in their faith or reminded of an ultimate life in heaven. Others may find that a cup of cold water offered on a hot day to show more of God's love than one million prayers or sermons ever could.

My personal dilemma has been this: how do I offer a hot meal on a winter day and neglect the chance for a further expression of God's love or salvation by offering time, money, listening or prayer in order to serve more meals? How can I go to a foreign village oppressed by their government and simply offer the message of Jesus' death on the cross without seeking to fight the state of injustice in which they are living (or fight the guilt of my own relative wealth)? If I am the pastor of a church someday, do I focus on getting people in the doors and in relationship with God through Jesus, the mediator? Or do I direct them to be building houses with Habitat for Humanity instead of reading the Bible to deepen their faith?

The answer is found in being able to accept that there may be no answer or there may be more than one answer. I do not simply build houses, donate clothes, look for dehydrated people on hot days just as I do not only focus on my own relationship with Jesus and encourage others to do the same while pretending that there is no more to do in

the world. There is not a once-and-for-all answer, but there is a call to individuals, churches, and the Church to live in the perfect and planned tension. Salvation and the Kingdom of God: the gospel of Both.

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