

What on earth is God doing?

by David Orton

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Do not fear, little flock, for it is your Father's good pleasure to give you the kingdom.

Luke 12:32.

The global financial system totters. Whole nations declare bankruptcy. Panic strikes the world markets. Political leaders meet late into the night searching for answers that don't exist. Militant Islam invades through immigration and population growth. Secularism dominates the public square. And the church pursues cultural appeasement. The nations are dismayed and men's hearts fail them for fear.

Where is God, and what on earth is he doing? Are there no answers for the nations? Does not God have a plan?

In the face of the economic and societal upheaval of the last one hundred years the Spirit of God cries out that he is the omnipotent One, the creator of the heavens and the earth, and the sustainer of all that is. The 20th century outpouring of the Holy Spirit is testimony to the fact that God is powerfully at work in the earth. On the one hand we have seen an increase of the kingdom in powerful outpourings and revivals, but on the other an increase of world wars, economic dislocation, societal turmoil, and natural disasters.

More going on than meets the eye

Even so, how do we understand these contradictions? Are we being 'flushed down the toilet' as some defeatist end-time theories would have us believe? Or is something more going on than meets the eye?

Paul, facing off with the wisdom of man, declares:

No eye has seen, no ear has heard, no mind has conceived what God has prepared for those who love him.

1 Corinthians 2:9 NIV

Human wisdom, fed by the five senses and natural reasoning, cannot see the things that God has destined for the heirs of salvation. But fortunately they are revealed to us by the Spirit (see v10). And so, something more than meets the eye is occurring.

Without a revelation of God and his kingdom our hearts will fear when he shakes the nations. This is why Paul prayed that the Ephesians, surrounded by an occult and pagan world, would receive the spirit of wisdom and revelation. Through seeing the ascended Christ by the Spirit, and apprehending his fullness, as his body, they would rule over principalities and powers (Eph 1:17-23). He had declared to them "the *whole* plan of God" (Acts 20:27), causing the entire region of Asia Minor (modern-day Turkey) to hear the word in a two-year period (Acts 19:10). Whatever this *whole* plan was, clearly the modern church has lost it. Instead we have been fed a *part*, a truncated gospel, focusing either on personal salvation and holiness, or the baptism and ministry of the Holy Spirit.

The *whole* plan of God

Prophetically speaking, the church has celebrated the feasts of Passover and Pentecost. In some measure, justification by faith and holiness (Passover) were restored as truths during the 16th to 19th centuries and the baptism of the Holy Spirit (Pentecost) in the 20th century, but the spiritual realities of the Feast of Tabernacles are yet to be celebrated. With her decline and Constantinian fall the church lost her grasp on the *whole* plan of God. However, this is now being progressively restored, as the wisdom writer so aptly declared, "*The path of the just is like a shining light, shining brighter and brighter until the full day*" (Prov 4:18). Over the last five hundred years God has been increasingly restoring light and truth to his people, setting them free

from their Babylonian captivity.

And so, what is the *whole* plan of God? The feasts of Passover and Pentecost, we understand and experience in some measure, but what is the significance of the feast of Tabernacles? Much can be unpacked from the typology of the feasts. Nevertheless, we will resist this temptation and focus on only several salient points. Passover was initially celebrated in Egypt on the eve of Israel's deliverance, Pentecost in the wilderness at Sinai, but Tabernacles was first celebrated in the Land as a celebration of realized destiny and a remembrance of the wilderness journey. As the feast of the Promised Land, celebrating Israel's final realization of the covenant promises, Tabernacles foreshadows the church finally entering the fullness of the kingdom on earth, despite her lengthy wilderness wanderings. Like Israel, the church has delayed its entrance into the fullness of the Land despite its celebration of Passover and Pentecost. Even though she has enjoyed the recovery of both feasts over the last several centuries, she still languishes in the wilderness through unbelief. She too has come to her Kadesh-Barnea. With her nose up against the store window, looking into a land of milk and honey, of God's kingdom coming to earth in miraculous power, she has pulled back in unbelief — there are giants in the land! Rather than occupying the land as a holy nation of king-priests and filling the whole earth with his glory she has been seduced by “doctrines of demons” (1 Tim 4:1), gullibly believing every defeatist and escapist end-time teaching, conveniently relieving her of the kingdom mandate to disciple nations (Gen 1:26; Mat 28:18-20). On seeing the giants of the land, the principalities and powers that rule cities and nations, she has found solace in escapist ‘rapture’ theories that wisp the church out of the world, rather than occupying *until* he comes (Lk 19:13).

The gospel of the kingdom of God

We have lost the gospel of the kingdom of God (Mat 4:23; 9:35; 24:14; Lk 9:2, 60; 16:16; Acts 1:3; 8:12; 19:8; 20:25; 28:23, 31). The gospel of personal salvation we understand, the message of the Holy Spirit's ministry, we value; but the message of the kingdom, as proclaimed by Christ and his apostles is all but forgotten. This was the ‘*whole* plan of God’ that Paul proclaimed to the Ephesians:

8 And he entered the synagogue and for three months spoke boldly, reasoning and persuading them **about the kingdom of God**. 9 But when some became stubborn and continued in unbelief, speaking evil of the Way before the congregation, he withdrew from them and took the disciples with him, reasoning daily in the hall of Tyrannus. 10 This continued for two years, so that all the residents of Asia heard the word of the Lord, both Jews and Greeks.

Acts 19:8-10 ESV

So, what is the gospel of the kingdom of God? It is the good news of a new creation — a new order of God's government; one of righteousness and justice, bringing peace to all peoples and nations (Isa 2:1-4; 9:1-7; Lk 2:11-14; 4:17-19; Rom 14:17; Rev 11:15; Ps 110; Ps 2). For many, it is a shock that this has already begun in the person of God's Son. Through becoming man, living his sinless life, learning obedience through suffering, and finally through his death, resurrection and ascension to the Father, the kingdom has come definitively to this planet. With God becoming man, a permanent shift of cosmic proportions has occurred (Rom 5:12-20; 8:18-22). Restored to the image of God, man has been reinstated to the government of the universe (Ps 8:4-6; Gen 1:26; Heb 2:5-8; 1 Cor 6:2-3; 15:27; Rom 8:17-21), and the new creation has begun (2 Cor 5:17; Gal 6:15; Isa 65:17; 66:22; Rev 21:1-5).

Consequently, we do not look to the second coming – nor to a future kingdom age – to achieve what God has already accomplished in the first coming. The kingdom of God came definitively in Christ when he rose from the grave as the first fruits of all those who believe (1 Cor 15:20-23; Col 1:18). Ascending, as the son of man (Dan 7:13-14; Mat 12:40; 16:28; 17:9; 19:28; 25:31-33; 26:24; Rev 1:13; 14:14), to the right hand of the Father he now rules the universe. From this position, he pours forth the promised Holy Spirit, imparting his perfected humanity (2 Pet 1:3-4; Heb 2:10-11; 5:8-9; Rom 8:1-4; Col 1:1-5) and sonship (Rom 8:15-16; Gal 4:6) to his body, and progressively extending his rule through it (Eph 3:10; 1:18-23; Mat 28:18-20; Isa 9:7; Pro 4:18; Eph 4:13), until all his enemies are subdued under his feet. Christ is, therefore, in heaven seated at the right hand of the Father *until* every enemy is defeated (Acts 3:21; Ps 110). He will not return until this occurs. Every pretender to the throne, every idol, and false ideology — every rebellious human system will fall before Jesus returns. God is shaking the heavens and the earth until only the unshakeable remains — the everlasting kingdom of God (Heb 12:25-27; Dan 2:44; 7:13-14). And when he does return only one enemy will remain — the last enemy, death; and this will be conquered through the final resurrection (1 Ths 4:13-18; 1 Cor 15:20-26). The gospel of the kingdom of God is the good news that the

universe is now being renovated — that the creator-redeemer God has invaded time and history, exorcising every demonic force, infusing the world with his glorious presence.

End-time scenarios

Therefore, any end-time scenario, which robs the body of Christ of its mandate to exemplify and extend Christ's victory in the world must, at least, be seriously questioned, if not viewed as a diabolical lie. Likewise, any view that relegates the gospel to personal faith only, castrating its power to transform creation must be rejected. Every sphere of human endeavour and creativity, including nature itself, is transfigured by Christ becoming man. Christ will be satisfied with the reward of his suffering (Isa 53:11-12), returning not only for a bride without blemish (Eph 5:27), but also a planet leavened and liberated by the kingdom (Mtt 13:33; Rom 8:18-25). The kingdom *has come* definitively through God in Christ, *is coming* progressively through the obedience of faith, and *will come* consummatively at the second coming.

Our Christology, therefore, must inform our eschatology. Our revelation of Christ, as the incarnate Son of God (i.e. God in a human body in this world), and as the Son of Man (i.e. Man perfected in this world) determines our understanding of end-things. As the God-Man, he is the full stop, the climax of history, and the fullness of the Father in a time-space world (Heb 1:1-3; Eph 1:10). This is the promised kingdom age. The old heavens and earth, the old covenant age has passed and the new has come – the New Jerusalem has arrived in the person of the Son (Rev 21:1-3). This will 'fuss' with many eschatological sacred cows — with escapist rapture theories, millennial schemes, and not to mention the role of Israel, the church, and the kingdom. Any deferment of the kingdom to another age, or abrogation of it to an old covenant ethnic identity is dismantled (Rom 2:28; 4:10-13; 9:6-8; Gal 6:15; Rev 2:9; Jn 1:47; 8:37-39). Christ and his body, the new Israel, in which there is neither Jew nor Greek (Rom 10:12; Gal 3:28; Col 3:11; Eph 2:11-22), is the climax of history — the fulfilment of the Edenic promise that the seed of the woman would crush the serpent's head (Gen 3:15); and thus also, of all the covenants and promises through the fathers (Eph 2:12; 3:6; Rom 11:17; 15:8-12; Gal 3:16; Heb 1:1-3).

Father's purpose

God's government in his Son was conceived in the heart of the Father before time began (Eph 1:4-12; 3:8-11; Rom 8:29; 1 Pet 1:19-20; Jn 3:35; 16:28; 17:5; 1 Cor 8:6; Heb 1:1-14). This has implications in how we approach God and our mission in the world. If God's purpose begins in the Fall of man, man and his dysfunction is the centre point. The purpose of the gospel is then man's rescue and recovery, resulting in an image of God as saviour and healer, in modern parlance, a therapist. This is surely the case in the contemporary Western church. Our half-baked theology has hopped into bed with the West's cult of psychology and produced a monster — a church system geared to the therapy of self. With God portrayed as a 'Dr Feelgood' the shelves of Christian bookstores groan with titles promoting a life of maximised living — of emotional, relational, financial and sexual realisation. However, if God's purpose begins in himself, the centre and circumference is found in him, in *relationship* rather than *recovery*. Paradoxically, when he is in the centre recovery occurs, for God is revealed as the 'Father of compassion and God of all comfort' (2 Cor 1:3-4). As a Father his purpose is discovered in the desire for mature sons. While, in compassion, he provides for our every need during our infancy, he is focussed on bringing us to maturity, so as to share in the family business (Lk 2:49; Gal 4:1-7). Recovery from the dysfunction of sin is necessary in this maturation process. He will not leave his sons in an eternal state of infancy (Heb 12:5-12; 2:10; Eph 4:13-14). And yet, this is where we want to remain, cooing and burbling in the playpen of personal salvation with our charismatic toys, but refusing the Father's call toward spiritual adulthood. This then is the gospel of the kingdom of God — a call to mature sonship, so as to share with the Father in the governance of the universe. This is why it is 'the *Father's* good pleasure to give us the kingdom' (Lk 12:32). God the Father has purposed to rule the universe through mature sons.

Father's DNA

Jesus is, therefore, the firstborn among many brothers (Rom 8:29; Col 1:15, 18; Heb 1:6; 2:10-12; Rev 1:5). The Father and God of us all has purposed to bring all his sons to glory, not just the firstborn. We all have the Father's DNA (Jn 1:12-13; 1 Pet 1:3, 23; 1 Jn 3:9; 5:4, 18). As Peter declares, we 'have been made participators in the divine nature' (2 Pet 1:4). With the Father's supernatural genes planted within us, family likeness is inevitable (2 Pet 1:3-9; Rom 8:29). As some have said about my own kids, "*The apple sure doesn't fall far from the tree!*" In fact, the power of genetic continuity is downright scary. More often than I care to admit, I hear an eerie echo of my parents or even grandparents in my words or behaviour.

And so, in this climax of history, God the Father will have a corporate Son in whom he delights. Having reached the full

stature of Christ, as a fellow-heir with him, it will inherit the Father's business. Having received the keys of the kingdom, a redeemed humanity will exercise dominion over the earth.

Therefore, there is no room for fear — the Father will give us the kingdom.

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