

Biblical Reflections

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Pared Down Version of an oral presentation that was taped.

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I bumped into a Public Broadcasting Documentary, and there was a British journalist in mid-paragraph. The sentence coming out of his mouth was “Christians say that wherever Christianity goes there is a spillover blessing to the community.” He said, “The idea is that Christianity is not only good for Christians, it’s good for the community at large.” He said, “Let’s go to the most Christianized city in America and let’s see what this looks like and its effect.” “We will define Christianized as the most people in church on Sunday per capita to the population of the city.” By that definition a Midwest American city was the most Christianized city in America. And so he said, “Let’s go look at this city and see the spillover blessing that comes from such a huge percentage of its population being Christianized.” The journalist began to look at the demographics of this American city. He began to look at the racial situations, the justice situations. He began to look at hospitals, at contagious diseases, at infant mortality, at the distribution of care-giving, at the quality of the schools, the test scores, the graduation statistics, the jobs, the housing, the general economy - could you get a job? If you could get a job, could you afford housing? He looked at homelessness and their programs. He looked at the racial factors and the economic factors of each one of these, and by the time he got done no one wanted to live in this town.

I was devastated because I could see the logic of his argument and presentation and I understood the truth of it. The program got worse because then he said: “We will go to some of the leading Christian ministers of this city and get their perspective on this.” He went to pillars of this city’s church community, the kind of people you and I would have chosen if we were going to make a documentary on the body of Christ in that community. He sat down with each one of these ministers and on tape with no editing, he showed them what we had just seen of the condition of their city and he asked them very simply one question. “As a spiritual leader in this community, how do you respond?” Each one of them, in one way or another, said the same thing. They said, “This is not our concern. We are spiritual leaders.” At that moment I was embarrassed to be called a Christian in America. This British journalist had used a biblical criterion to judge us, and we had been found wanting.

I began on what for me was a very personal journey with God to understand the difference between the truth that I believed in wholeheartedly, and the picture that I was seeing as the fruit of our work. I’m going through mission statistics that we all know:

Africa - 80% evangelized south of the Sahara;
Africa, the most Christianized continent in the 21st century;
Uganda - 60 to 70% Christian; Ghana - 50 to 60% Christian;
Nigeria - 45 to 55% Christian; Rwanda - 70 to 80% Christian;
Namibia - 80 to 90% Christian.

All of these places are riddled with disease, with poverty, with ignorance, with lack of education, with violence, with injustice, with economic destruction. God was weighing in on me what a disciplined nation does not look like.

That's what the 10/40 window countries are looking at. The Muslim accusations are: 1) Christianity is not an African religion; which hits at our cultural insensitivity in evangelism. Now never mind that Islam is neither an African religion. 2) What does Christianity do for the people? The answer is - Nothing! They are hitting at the fact that there is no spillover blessing.

Nagaland is 80 to 90% Christian - 70% of the teenagers in the capital are drug addicts. Where is the spillover blessing? How could 60 years of revival in Rwanda end in Christians committing genocide on Christians because they came from different tribes? How did the work of the body of Christ in this century move so far from the promises of God? Was poverty, disease, violence, corruption, injustice and chaos the fruit of our mission? These were poor countries before. They are poorer now since Christianity has come. They were less diseased before.

The first 1500 years of church history, the church transformed nations. The gospel transformed communities. When Christianity came to Jerusalem and came to Greece and came to Rome, and then to Europe, those nations were unrecognizable afterwards. They were not just nations that now had huge numbers of Christians who all went to church on Sunday morning. They were nations that had different kinds of government that dispensed better justice than before Christianity came. They were nations that had their economics transformed, that had more quality in the quality of life that their citizens enjoyed after Christianity came. They were nations that were transformed in their view of education.

We are not revolutionizing communities, tribes and nations, even though we are seeing the greatest church growth in the history of the church. So what has changed? I was seeing the fruit of preaching primarily salvation and salvation alone. Salvation had never intended to be the message. It was a part of the message. The gospel of the Kingdom was reduced to primarily a message about how to get into the Kingdom. When we talk about the salvation message, the born-again experience, the new birth in Jesus Christ, we are simply talking about the doorway and the entrance to a message that God has for the entirety of life. Jesus never used the phrase "Gospel of salvation". It is not once used in all of

scripture, and yet it has become almost automatic in our circles. Jesus often spoke of the gospel of the kingdom.

We want to get people saved, and when they are saved we want to get them in churches. When they are saved and in a church, we want them to go on missions to get people saved, to get people in churches, to go on missions. And we are being successful. We have this idea that when the gospel of salvation has been preached and a church has been planted, then we're finished. But when we look at the quality of life in those nations, we know we cannot move on. If we do not address the needs of those nations, those nations will come to us. This is a pattern in church history. When we have not reached out to those who have-not, the have-nots will reach us.

This truncated gospel is like having a newborn infant who is perfect with five fingers on each hand, and five toes; they poop their pants and spit sour milk and they are just wonderful. If that child is the same at 20 years of age, we consider it a tragedy. We have a church today, a generation of Christians that are adorable. They are wonderful. But they are way too old to be pooping their pants and spitting up sour milk. It's time for growing up. This is not what God intended. It's time for Christians to "grow up".

God wants to transform us again with the gospel of the Kingdom, with the word of God about all of life. He wants to make us salt and light to our families, our neighborhoods and our nation, making them better places to live for everyone; better towns; better nations. We are satisfied to stay at that point of new birth and excitement.

I believe we have developed split thinking. For over 2 centuries the church has been absorbed in a split view of the world. Simplistically, the way this developed is one part of the church said that God cares about people's needs, God cares about what happens to the people: We need to provide health care, food, shelter, clothing. Whether they get saved or not is in God's hands. In response to that, another part of the church said that the only thing important is that people get saved and that a church is planted. We began to think in terms of secular and sacred. We began to think in terms of a spiritual kingdom and a material world; of salvation versus social interaction; of eternal values versus temporal values; of heavenly mindedness over against earthly mindedness; of evangelical as opposed to liberal. Both sides were right and both sides were wrong. This is a false view of the kingdom of God. God is not only concerned about the unseen; He's concerned about the seen. He is not only concerned about the heavenly; he is concerned about the earthly. He is not only Lord of the spiritual realms, but of the material realm as well. When we introduced this dichotomy we lopped off an enormous amount of truth. Jesus taught the kingdom of God. The message He dealt with was sin, salvation, heaven, hell, prayer, spiritual warfare and justice, government, equity, economics, the righteous use of science, communications, technology, family. The result of this dichotomy is that we have

never had more Christians in the history of the human race and we have never had a less influential church.

How do we get back the gospel of the kingdom? First of all, we need a supreme Christ. In Colossians you see Paul struggling with these very issues. The Colossians know God. They're saved. They're in the kingdom. But they are divided in their understanding of what the kingdom is about. They have a very small Jesus. And Paul, in chapter 1 verses 15-20, is trying to expand their minds to describe the authority of Christ. "For by Him all things were created, things in heaven and on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones, powers, rulers or authorities, all things were created by Him. He is before all things and in Him ALL things hold together." What about all did you not get? In Colossians 1: 9-14 you see what Paul wants. He wants them to move past salvation into the fullness of the power and wisdom of God. He has said, "I have never stopped praying for you that you will be filled with the knowledge of His will through all spiritual wisdom and understanding." Verse 10 – "Bearing fruit in every good work, growing in the knowledge of God." You can feel Paul going, "You're Jesus is too small. He didn't just come to save you." Verse 20 – "And through Him he reconciled to himself all things. Whether things on earth or things in heaven by making peace through His blood shed on the cross."

Jesus died for my soul. Praise God! But that's the least of it. He died for every thing He made. It is all His. It is all reconciled to Him through the blood of Jesus Christ. He is not at war with anything. The people were converted, they were filled with the Spirit. They had the basics of salvation, but they didn't understand the kingdom of light and how it manifests itself in their daily lives up against the kingdom of darkness. So God wanted to put feet to their salvation and answer their questions; "How do we live?" "What is He Lord of?" They knew Him as Savior and Comforter. They didn't know Him as the Lord of justice, the Kings of Kings, Jehovah Jirah, God our Provider. He is supreme in everything. This means there is no such thing as sacred and secular. It does not exist.

Let's not point at the non-Christians for secularizing society. The only people who can secularize society are Christians. Those who live in darkness cannot spiritualize anything. They cannot bring the light. They cannot take the light away. It is those who bear the burden of the light who are responsible. That is you and I, not the lost. If our Christmas is secularized it is because Christians no longer know what Christmas means. If our government is secularized it is because Christians no longer know how to fight for justice. If economies are consumed by greed and secular material gain, it is because Christians, who are often in the majority, have no idea of how to live out God's values in money. If families are destroyed, and they are destroyed, it is because the church no longer understands family. The Christian divorce rate just surpassed the non-Christian divorce rate in the Bible belt! God wants to reconcile all of life. He is Lord of salvation and He is Lord of social concerns. He is supreme over the

eternal and He is supreme over the temporal. His is King of heaven and He is King of earth. We must destroy split thinking.

I don't believe God is letting us into the 10/40 window because our gospel is inferior to their gospel. Muslims, Hindus and Buddhists faith has to with all of life, not just one part of life. Christians with split thinking go into their communities with an emphasis on salvation alone and we give them no understanding of how to live in the political realm, or the economic realm. God wants us to enter the 10/40 window, but we need a gospel that addresses all of life.

I was driving across America for 7 months listening to the entire Bible on tape. Suddenly I realized that a passage was on healthcare. Whoa! He was just teaching in another passage about economics." Whoa!

Moses was disciplining a nation. When God said reach every creature, He gave us a model in Jesus and Paul and the New Testament writers. When God said, "Disciple a nations," he didn't need to repeat Himself. He'd already written in great detail how God interacts with a nation. He sent Moses to disciple them. Wow! It's all there in detail. But what have we done? We've allegorized it and made it about salvation. So bondage to slavery - oh that's not about political injustice and economics, that's about bondage to sin. Oh, they're in the wilderness, that's not about being refugees with no help and no care. They are not even refugees. They are physically displaced people. They are people without passports. Oh that's about the valley of indecision, not the Promised Land! That's not about the God of justice and the God of economics, that's about getting saved. You can interpret the Bible that way because the truth of salvation is woven throughout, but those are not allegories.

Moses has a real nation in real time, and real space and real trouble. They are not a people and God says to them, "I will make you a people." Look at this nation. They have no schools. They have no government. They have no work ethic. They have been slaves for 300 years. They have been in exile for 400 years. They have no land, no economy. They have a welfare mentality. They've never had their work identified with their income. They have no system of social order. They have no army. They have no visible means of support. There will never be a people who are needier. God says to them, "You are not a people and I will make you a people." He begins to disciple them, and in the wilderness they spend 40 years of Moses getting God's plan for how to develop a nation. And then they spend the next 300 years in the Promised Land executing it.

In 300 years they go from the condition we just saw to becoming the greatest nation on the face of the earth. The Queen of Sheba travels from the southern Saudi Arabian peninsula North to the kingdom that is known all over the world for it's great wisdom, prosperity, justice and righteousness. She meets the king there, King Solomon. And she spends a long extended time with him, to look in detail at the prosperity of his kingdom. And when she gets ready to leave, she

says, "Nothing I have heard compares to what I have actually seen." This is surely the greatest kingdom on the face of this earth because you see God said, "I will take a people that are not a people, and I will disciple them into a great nation." And he did it. And He wrote it all down, not as an allegory leading to the New Testament, but as a foundation of how to live leading to salvation and the power to live that way.

Knowing the values and the principles was not enough. God had invested those in the Jews. We also needed a way to overcome the darkness of our own souls and only the cross would ever win that for us. But it was not to wipe out the Old Testament and to move on to a new mystic religion that no longer dealt with the material world. It was building on the foundation of the principles of God and all of life. Now what happens when we take the Old Testament from our gospel? We become the new mystics. Christianity as we preach it today has produced more mysticism in India than Hinduism ever did. When you take the principles of God in life out of the message, the salvation message becomes something unseen, mystical and detached from the material world that God has made.

How do we get back then to understanding how God thinks about the nations? We have to go back to when God disciplined a nation, how did he do it? And it's all there in the books of Moses. Jesus has not come to wipe Moses out, but to build on him. Everywhere I preach this message, Christians come up to me and say, "But wasn't that Old Testament. It's not relevant now is it?" Only the righteousness laws change between the old and the New Testament. It's still not good to commit adultery. It's still not good to murder. That's a good message in Rwanda. It's still not good to lie, cheat and steal. That would have some relevance in Korea. It's not good to hate your enemy. That would have a lot of relevance in America. Jesus builds on what came before. Jesus was disciplined by the Old Testament. Paul was disciplined by the Old Testament.

What did Moses teach them? This is Deuteronomy, chapter 1. Moses is teaching government to 3 1/2 million people in the middle in the wilderness who have never run their own government. They've never had formal education. They've never owned land. God is going to form the first government. Now how does He do it? In America we want God to pick. We don't want those Americans getting out there and voting for terrible people. We want God to pick. But when God instituted government, who did the picking? The people!

God said via Moses that the people must choose some wise and respectable men from each tribe to rule over you. The people elected from the beginning. Maybe this is where our forefathers got "government is for the people, and by the people, and of the people." God literally, from the beginning, gave the people the right to choose and then the right to live under their choice. He thought that was a great way for people to be disciplined; to be responsible for their decisions. Do you know what they're teaching in some Pentecostal churches now? Don't vote at all. It is a secular activity. In the election before last, less than 40% of

America voted. Less than 25% of Christians voted. Isn't that devastating? We do not know the Lord of justice, the God of government and we do not know how to introduce Him to the nations we are reaching

In chapter 15 He taught them economics. In verses 1-10 He taught limited debt. America has almost unlimited national debt and we have more private debt on credit cards than we do national debt. God said debt is to be limited. You are to have a national policy against poverty. I can't go with the republicans or the democrats on this in my own country. Republicans ignore that the poor exist and the Democrats have policies that are going to create the poor. God said, "Do not ignore that they exist and create policies that eliminate them." He said, "You will lend to many nations, but you will borrow from none." What's the principle? No national debt. Why are Americans going all over the world to Christians teaching economics? We fail on all counts, because we haven't learned economics from the Bible.

Arab brothers have a hard time with America. It's not just the Muslim radicals. It's not just the extremists. It's that we are a country that says we are one thing, and act like another. We have so much power in the world and we are not looking at God for how to use that power. The disenfranchised of the world are confused by the so-called "Christian" nations even when they are Christians. We need the gospel of the Kingdom.

Only the churches loss of who God is can secularize society. Only His people seeing Him again for who He is, can transform it. The challenge of this century and a generation of missions is about God and who He is. It's about knowing God in a fuller sense. It's about the supremacy of Christ and His message over all of life. It's about being reformed so that we can reform. We need to rediscover God in all of His glory, and He will lead us into transformation. Each domain in human society reveals an attribute of God. The attribute of economics is goodness. The attribute of government is justice. The attribute of family is love. The attribute of the arts is beauty. These are all in existence because God made them and He is reconciled to them, and He wants to celebrate Himself not through one domain - the ecclesiastical structure - the attribute there is holiness and mercy. He wants to celebrate Himself through all of society. Each domain reveals Him and we must go back and study the God of government, the God of economics, and the God of family. He wants to reveal Himself to you and me. What kind of God is it that wants to be so intimate, that is so determined to be known? We need multiplication not subtraction. What vision are we giving the churches we're planting? What tools are we giving the new converts that we are winning? The approach to missions in the next era must get rid of the dichotomy and restore Jesus to Lordship over every domain.

Will we take the largest church in history and make it larger and make it the deepest church in history, will it be the church that turns nations upside down? Amen.