

The Kingdom of God- An Essay

Editor's note:

This essay was prepared for presentation at the Faith Builders Colloquy on the Kingdom of God in January, 2006. Melvin Lehman did not find time to revise or polish his essay after critiques by responders Richard Herr and John D. Martin. He offers it here in hopes that despite its imperfect and incomplete state, it may be profitable to disciples of Jesus Christ. Please read with that understanding. Reader comments are welcome at fbep@fbep.org, ATTN: Melvin.

Preface:

Writing is not natural to me. Halfway through the work on this essay, I began to wonder why I had undertaken to write on this subject. In the process I perused David Bercot's book *The Kingdom That Turned the World Upside Down* and Donald Kraybill's book *The Upside Down Kingdom*. These men have made a tremendous contribution to the literature on the subject. I sincerely doubt that I can significantly improve on what they have already said. Nevertheless, I pressed on trying to break some new ground that may be helpful in the ongoing discussion of the Kingdom of God.

Of particular interest to me is the place of the present created order in the Kingdom of God. I am persuaded that the Church of Jesus Christ is the "mystery that was kept hidden from the beginning." It is the fulfillment of the ancient prophecies and is the temple of God on earth today.

There are three primary concerns that I attempt to say something about:

- The first is the central theme of the Kingdom of God in the Scriptures and the Bible.
- The second is that we would understand that "the earth is the Lord's and the fullness thereof." The Kingdom of God has an active interface with the material world.
- The third burden of the essay is that we develop and maintain a high view of the Church of Jesus Christ.

In the process of addressing these concerns, I admit to striking out on a few tangents. At first glance they may seem inconsequential to the main arguments. I think they have significance. The discussion about "natural selection, survival of the fittest, and/or adaptation" is developed to show the contrast between "the rules of this (fallen) world" and the principles that govern the Kingdom of God. We live in a fallen world and so are certainly affected by "this world." However, those who have entered the Kingdom need to understand the place of "suffering love" in a fallen world. And so I tend to ramble about on these subjects. The reader (and writer) may sometimes get lost in the ramblings. Forgive me. I pray that you will be a discerning and merciful reader.

Some may be disappointed in that I have said little about manifestations of the Kingdom in the future. I believe there will be a continual unveiling of the Kingdom. However, I know so little about the details that I feel quite unqualified to make projections. Be assured, the Lord will have His way. Besides all this, I lament the truth that so many seem fascinated with the future Kingdom and fail to see and participate in the Kingdom that Jesus offers to us daily.

On the end of the essay, I have begun somewhat of a commentary on the “Kingdom Parables.” They feel like an addendum that needs finished. Perhaps the time will come when I can finish the survey of those parables. I would have commented on the Sermon on the Mount if time and energy had permitted. Again much has been written on that sermon of sermons. I have little if anything to add to what has been written. Let the words speak for themselves. Let God’s people walk in obedience to that great Kingdom Manifesto. Finally, I echo the prayer of our Lord, “Thy will be done in earth as it is in heaven.”

Introduction

As a child I greatly enjoyed “connect the dots” pages in my personal coloring book. Confronted with a page of black points arranged chaotically on a vast plain of whiteness invited first my curiosity and then my creative powers to the adventure of discovery. My inherent sense of logic told me that the little numbers beside each of the black dots was the key to bringing order to the chaos of that vast plain of whiteness. For some unknown reason, I rebelled against the idea of free-handing the connections between the dots. Yielding to the compulsion to find the shortest distance between two points, I would scramble to find a straight edge and pencil in order to get the job done right. The more complex and obscure the outcome, the better! But to me it was sheer pleasure to see the picture emerge as more and more of the dots became connected. The pleasure only increased as the crayons and a little more imagination embellished the picture with beauty and depth.

Perhaps the fascination with “connect the dots” coloring books was indicative of my personal compulsion toward “big picture” understandings of life and history. One should never forget that the particulars of life are important and significant only as they are perceived and understood within the context of the larger picture of life. Otherwise they become meaningless nonsense in a life devoid of defining structure.

This failure to understand the place of particulars in the big picture is precisely why western civilization is headed toward increasing despair and loss of will. Allen Bloom, no friend to Christianity, nevertheless argues convincingly in “The Closing of the American Mind” that the loss of ethical standards has left the West with too few mileposts (dots) with which to construct a picture of meaning and purpose or a path to the nobler aspirations of men. He shows convincingly how this loss has been devastating to academic rigor and aliveness but fails to connect this cultural catastrophe directly to the decline of the Judeo-Christian world view. Francis Schaeffer, a Christian apologist from the 70’s, in “How Shall We Then Live” develops this thought from the Christian

worldview, showing that as the “big picture” of God in history recedes from the memory of culture and civilization, the particulars, the nuts and bolts of daily living, are mere blips on the screen that appear momentarily and then disappear in the blackness of nothing. The result is that the “fight” has gone out of western culture. A preoccupation with selfish living and self protection has taken its place. Oh, it’s true that Westerners will fight hard when their personal peace, perceived personal rights, or their wealth is threatened. But this is only illusory energy. It too is gone when the lights go out and the music is turned down. On the political front our leaders have tried hard to inspire us with the ideals of democratic government as worthy of the blood, sweat, and tears of men. But even this turns out to be a “particular” that begs for a reason to exist especially in light of government corruption and other vast breeding grounds of selfish living. We could continue this criticism of western culture’s failure to construct a cohesive worldview that inspires, but there is little reason to do so. What ought we to expect from a generation that believes in material reality only?

The concern of this paper is not this particular loss. While the decline of western civilization is lamentable, a worse and more critical tragedy is the failure of Christianity to set forth a compelling worldview that gives direction and inspiration for daily living. The core of that tragedy is not so much that Christians have not convinced the unbelievers...tragic as that may be. The core is that our worldview has grown so small that we are in great danger of not convincing our posterity of its truth and even descending into de facto unbelief ourselves. This dangerous movement toward de facto unbelief has resulted in the inability of Christianity to stand upon its feet and to move powerfully among the peoples of the world pointing a way forward. For Christianity too it seems to me has descended into a array of randomly arranged “dots” that fail to form a picture that is big enough to court the imaginations and dreams of men. The result has been a notable weariness that has descended over the Christian community. The causes of this suffocating weariness are worth examining.

One of the nicest compliments that my wife, Shelia, and I ever received came from my eldest daughter in an anniversary card. It read something like this: “I so much appreciate your example as you grow older. Your love is not a tired love...” I have never forgotten the implications of the phrase “tired love.” Marriages that lose the sense of exploration and discovery develop a “tiredness” that can be so debilitating. Likewise a Christianity that is stuck on a few favorite verses and clichés that assure personal salvation but little else, will grow tired quickly.

I contend that for many Christians, not only has “first love” been lost, but a “tired love” has come to predominate. Christianity itself, in the main feels “tired” to me as I metaphorically place myself outside and look in. Why is it tired?

The weariness of Christianity is directly related to an improper emphasis on personal salvation at the expense of a major emphasis in the New Testament, namely, the Kingdom of God!

This becomes apparent when one observes that for many the primary reason for personal salvation is to escape hell and gain entrance to the pearly gates. Please understand that the fear of God that is provoked in the sinner by the prospects of hell is appropriate and not to be ignored. But if the sinner who is turned about by such a fear is then left to build both his initial conversion and his Christian experience upon the basis of that fear, his Christianity will be weak and grow susceptible to a pervasive tiredness. Let the discerning reader note carefully that the intention here is not to ignore or downplay the pursuit of personal salvation in the fear of God. The call to flee from the judgment to come is more than necessary. The hope of an eternal rest with God and the glories thereof are essential to the Christian's theology and life. There is no entry to the Kingdom outside of a saving knowledge in Christ Jesus. This we affirm and declare. However, I maintain that something is wrong with the typical evangelical understanding of salvation and its purposes. The difficulty with the current understanding of personal salvation is twofold. **The first is one of omission or neglect. An adequate basis for motivated holy living in time and space is missing. The second is that "fire escape salvation" taken alone is essentially self-centered because it cares primarily about "me" instead of the Kingdom of God.** And so I maintain that such "salvation centered" theology does not provide an adequate base for abundant living in Christ. I also suspect that such a theology is inadequate for sustained missionary zeal.

Perhaps it is important to the discussion here to examine what I understand to be the current evangelical understanding of salvation. There are at least two general views.

The first has little or no place for active sanctification let alone victorious living. It is based on the "faith alone" idea. Salvation is all about the atonement of Christ and a legal transaction that has taken place in the books of heaven. It's a done deal once the unbeliever delivers up enough *mind belief* to be called faith in Christ. All that is left to do in this life after one has achieved such a level of intellectual faith is to endure the ups and downs of what happens to all men, secure as much pleasure from it as possible without doing too much damage, and then die and go to heaven where there are no more troubles. All this time, the earth, the material world, God's creation, can "go to hell," for that is its destiny anyway. Holy living has little or no value in this system of thought.

Serious scholars of the Bible know that this position simply does not square with the Bible but often seem confused by this incongruence. I think this confusion comes from equating the Kingdom of heaven (or Kingdom of God) with a classical understanding of heaven; that is some distant far-off place to be experienced in some distant far-off time. This understanding inadvertently denigrates the created world, the world of matter, time and space while placing the reality of Kingdom living somewhere in the distant future.

The second is similar in that the salvation of man remains central but differs in that it values the sanctified life to a greater or lesser extent and even insists that a sanctified life is essential to salvation. And so many become preoccupied with what you can do or cannot do and still "go to heaven." **Note that personal salvation is still the primary interest here.** This often gives rise to legalistic systems of thought where Christianity is reduced to several seemingly important do's and don'ts that unfortunately often have the

appearance of being arbitrarily chosen. This system of thought often produces a guilt roller coaster that sometimes is up and sometimes down with ultimate salvation daily in question; all of this based on the quality of today's performance. Often the prevailing attitude is: "If we can just hang on without making any serious mistakes until death or the Lord returns, we shall be saved and live happily ever after." To its credit, this position does not ignore the Biblical call to holiness in life. However, it bogs down and becomes confused when it marries holiness of life with personal salvation rather than fitness for the Kingdom. Again I think this confusion is because of an inadequate understanding of the Kingdom of God; particularly its reality in the cosmos today.

Both of these approaches to Christianity and personal salvation hold some measure of truth but are inadequate to sustain a life of abundant living. Neither of them creates a basis for healthy interaction with the good earth (the material world) that the Lord has made for the inhabitants that live thereon. Neither of them holds fast to the present reality of the Kingdom. Matter, space, and time are curses and not blessings. The first offers lots of space for living by the flesh and the other can be so paralyzing with its stilted and fearful approach to life in this world.

But are these mere theological ramblings with no historical or Scriptural basis? Can we find supporting evidence or information or light that affirms this bold statement that western Christianity has been severely weakened by its emphasis on the salvation of man rather than the glory of God expressed in the Kingdom of God that is present and active on planet earth today?

In search of a historical reference point that supports my thesis I turn to the Reformation. The primary emphases of Reformation era theology as they are understood in the Christian community today are simply inadequate to construct a compelling vision for abundant living on earth. As I understand it, the emphases of the Reformation proper wrecked the confidence people had placed in the old Catholic Church and provided a path to personal salvation independent of official Church functions. This emphasis on the individual and the steady attack on the organized Church along with the subsequent chaos inadvertently produced a personal salvation centered theology that had few Kingdom moorings. Serious students of the Reformation will recognize that I am in danger of over-generalizing this point. I agree. Still I think it is true that over time and several generations the theology of the Reformation worked itself out in this way. The Church proper in time became relatively unimportant in respect to personal salvation. This did great damage to the concept of the Kingdom of heaven; particularly its manifestation in the body of Christ. I do not intend at all to say that the work of the reformers is unimportant or untrue. Luther, Calvin, the Anabaptists and others confronted the Church with some brutal truths that shook the world of their day...and it needed shaking. We rightly admire their courage in doing this. But I will argue that the fruit of mainstream Reformation thought over the course of the centuries has demonstrated its most glaring weakness- **its inability to see very far beyond issues of personal salvation toward the unity of the Kingdom of God.**

To be fair, we must acknowledge Calvin's interest in the Kingdom of God. He did have such a concept and tried to call people to it. It is important also to note that the much maligned radical reformers, the Anabaptist, were very much interested in the Kingdom of God on earth. Their writings reveal this interest. All over Northern Europe they made serious attempts to "seek the Kingdom of God first." Sometimes their enthusiasm raced ahead of their understanding and so such tragedies as occurred at Munster marred their testimony for the Kingdom. But much credit must be given to them for pursuing this idea of the Kingdom that is so prevalent in the Bible. Luther must also be given credit for bringing dignity to the labors of the working man. He made it clear that the Lord smiles on the honest efforts of the farmer as he works the good earth thus creating an interface between material reality and holy living.

But back to our point; I think an honest look at the fruit of Reformation era thought and practice reveals serious gaps and sometimes misguided emphases. For example, "salvation by faith alone" is not a phrase that comes verbatim from the Scriptures. But nevertheless, this became the centerpiece of Luther's theology, at least as it is popularly understood. The emphasis by Luther on this one phrase has created ambiguity in the church's understanding of salvation and paved the way for an ignored worldliness among believers.

In the 500 years that have elapsed since the birth of the Reformation proper, comparatively little thought has been given to developing the concept of the Kingdom of God, while enormous amounts of energy have gone into the mass evangelization of the world's population based on the understanding of the need for the salvation of the individual. This is not all bad of course; nevertheless I think we are paying a price for this lopsided emphasis.

And so I propose that what is needed is not a restoration of Reformation era evangelical thought and practice in respect to the need for a personal salvation as important as that may be. **What is needed is a birthing of a 21st century understanding of the Kingdom of God and the subsequent realities for life on earth.** Again, let us give credit where credit is due. Certainly we owe an enormous debt to the reformers for their work and courage in challenging a corrupted church and calling us all to the way of salvation.

But what do the Scriptures say? Do they lend affirmation to our thesis? I contend that they do. One is startled to discover how the predominant emphasis of the Kingdom of God is so obvious in the Gospels. For example, when Jesus offered the model prayer at the bequest of his disciples, you would surely expect him to pray for the "salvation of all men." After all this is the model prayer. But there is not even a hint of this as being the most important component of Jesus' prayer. Listen to the opening lines:

"Our Father which art in heaven, hallowed be thy name. Thy Kingdom come; thy will be done in earth as it is in heaven!"

And then listen again to the closing lines:

“For thine is the Kingdom, and the power and the glory, forever! Amen!”

It may be argued that the salvation of man is implied in these lines. But if we agree that it is implied rather than explicit, then we agree that the primary emphasis is on the Kingdom. **In other words the Kingdom is the context for salvation, not salvation the context for the Kingdom.** If the context is confused in our minds the definitions and understanding of the sub-context will always be skewed.

Or consider the message of John the Baptist. His message was not- “Repent, for there is very great danger you will go to hell” but rather “Repent, for the Kingdom of heaven is at hand!” The emphasis in John’s call is quite significant. I will quickly affirm that “judgment” is present in the message of John. But *judgment* for John comes because the Kingdom is present and passed me by while I wallowed in my unrepentant state and thus became unfruitful.

“And now also, the axe is laid unto the root of the trees: every tree therefore which bringeth not forth good fruit is hewn down and cast into the fire.” -Luke 3:9 (see also Matthew 3:1-12)

It is quite important to understand that the greater judgment lies not on the head of the Los Angeles prostitute who hardly knows any better, but rather on the upright man who has perhaps sought personal salvation and had every opportunity to receive the message of the Kingdom but turned away to a life of unfruitful gamboling in the things of this world.

The message of John is affirmed by Jesus himself as he opened his ministry in Galilee.

“From that time Jesus began to preach, and to say, Repent: for the Kingdom of heaven is at hand.” -Matthew 4:17 (see also Matthew 3:2)

Clearly, both John and Jesus tie repentance and by implication, personal salvation, to the imminent presence of the Kingdom of God. We should do not less.

Matthew 13 records a number of parables that explain aspects of the Kingdom of heaven. The parables close with a special call to all Bible teachers:

Matthew 13:52: “Therefore every scribe which is instructed unto the Kingdom of Heaven is like unto a man that is a householder, which bringeth forth out of His treasure things new and old.”

This passage is clear. The scribe who has not been “instructed unto the Kingdom of Heaven” is missing a major point. The implications at least suggest that without “instruction unto the Kingdom of Heaven” the teaching of the teacher grows stale and takes on a “sameness” that one might even call boring. By way of contrast, the teacher who is “instructed unto the Kingdom of God” has an endless landscape to explore and

discover. He never tires of reflecting and refining his understanding of the “old” while he brings forth the new and beautiful. Life becomes an endlessly, exciting experience of discovery in the things of God. Failure to be instructed unto the Kingdom of Heaven will mean that this “endlessly, exciting, experience” will certainly pass us by. This, I think, is one of the keys to understanding the “tiredness of a stale Christianity.”

I suspect that at least part of the problem with unconnected dots and subsequently a lack of cohesiveness in the Christian worldview is that the scribes of our day have not been instructed unto the Kingdom of Heaven and thus have few “new treasures” to bring forth from the house while the old has grown stale though it is true.

And so the purpose of this essay is to connect the dots in such a way that the Kingdom of God would truly hold center stage in the picture that emerges. It would be foolish to assume that I will do this perfectly or even adequately. Hopefully our hearts will at least be stirred to search out the matter and see if these things be true or nay.

We will begin by some observations of history from a Christian perspective. Later we will transition to an examination of the Kingdom parables as recorded in the Gospels. We will conclude with a look at the charter document of the Kingdom of God- The Sermon on the Mount

A VIEW OF HISTORY:

On my bookshelf, I have a book titled, *The Meaning of History*. The book is authored by Ronald Nash and it surveys the various views that philosophers and intellectuals have had since the time of the ancient Greeks. Nash is a Christian and does well with exposing his readers to the important questions. At the beginning of the book he cites three questions that all serious speculative historians have grappled with. They are:

1. What is the pattern of history?
2. What is the mechanism of history?
3. What is the purpose or value of history?

John Newport summarized these questions well when he raised the series of questions in this quote:

“What is the ultimate significance of history? Is history merely the result of chance or inexorable Fate, or is it a divine drama with a plot, a plan, or a goal? Is there a hidden master Dramatist? These questions are significant and vitally related to human life and destiny, to our highest hopes and deepest fears. For if there is not purpose, how can we do anything but despair?”

I am exploring these questions not with the same intent as Nash. Nash hopes to show the inadequacy of the non-Christian philosophies of history with the intent of exonerating

and establishing the Christian view as the only view that really fits the data. He does a remarkable job of this making it a book worth reading for both the amateur and the professional historian. My purpose is different in that I hope to refine or maybe even define the Christian worldview with the Kingdom of God at its center. For I have come to suspect that if we look through the lens marked “the centrality of the salvation of man” we will see something quite different than the lens that is marked “the centrality of the Kingdom of God.”

One day when I was young, perhaps in my early twenties, I came to a perplexing question in my meditations. I had been sitting “under the sound of the Gospel” where the plan of salvation was being explained. Perhaps the intent of the speaker was not so, but I came away with the distinct impression that God pre-ordained a little game somewhere in eternity past wherein he would create a world and would place rather ignorant inhabitants in that world who would miserably fail. Then he would graciously and wondrously enter into that failure with a plan of salvation to save some of those poor ignorant inhabitants. He would do this because of His love for them. It must be understood that according to this scheme of history, this was all according to a pre-ordained master plan with all the details included.

Now, why was I perplexed? Well, no matter how I thought about it, I ended up with a sadistic heavenly Father who apparently was quite willing to let many experience the horrors of hell while the details of his salvation plan unfolded. I was stuck. I did not realize it at the time, but later I came to understand that if indeed the **central purpose of history was and is the salvation of man**, this apparent contradiction of the very nature of a loving and just God and the associated perplexities simply will not go away. Apparently, many Christians either never thought of this contradiction or have by default accepted it as just “the way it is.” At any rate I think there is a better way to think of this that is more congruent with what we understand about the nature of our heavenly Father.

I am not unaware that I am treading where angels fear to tread. For I can lay no claim to understanding the mind of God above others and will quickly concede that there is the ever-present apparent contradiction of the sovereignty of God, His foreknowledge, and the concept of predestination as they are contrasted with the love of God, His grace, His mercy, His loving-kindness, and even the gift of free-will. We can make some headway on some of these perplexing questions, but it is not my purpose to examine them exhaustively at this point. However, I think that part of the answer to these questions lies in our view of the purpose of time, space, and history. In this regard we address the third question that Nash raises in his text before the others. “**What is the purpose or value of history?**”

I propose that the central purpose of history is the real presence of the Kingdom of God in time and space. I believe this was purposed in the heart of our heavenly Father from the beginning and that He will not rest until it has come in its fullness. It is my intention to show that the narrative of the Bible supports this view and that at least some of our unanswered questions are spoken to by such a view and much clarity is brought to our understanding of God himself.

Let us begin at the beginning. The first two verses of the Bible introduce us to a cosmic wasteland that was created by God and then given form and substance by the Spirit of God.

“In the beginning, God created the heaven and the earth. And the earth was without form, and void; and darkness was upon the face of the deep. And the spirit of God moved upon the face of the waters.” -Genesis 1:1-2

Much speculative argument has been birthed by the language of these verses. It is not my purpose to enter into those speculations except to say that one cannot date the age of the created “cosmic wasteland” by the text. Neither do I think that archaeologists can accurately date this wasteland. All attempts to do so end up being inconclusive. However, what is clear is that there was indeed a created material world that had no form and was void. The point is this. This “cosmic wasteland” **is created** and thus does have a beginning point. It is not in and of itself, eternal! By extension, we are willing to argue that atoms and molecules are not an eternal reality, at least not as a static unchanging reality. They are however, the visible reality of a segment of eternity called time and space. God can and does exist outside of time, space, and the material world. However, it is clear from the record in Genesis that He is able to interact with the cosmos at every level. He speaks and the cosmos is moved!

Along this line of thought, one is intrigued by present understandings of the physical universe. The first understanding is the apparent matter-energy constant also known as the “law of conservation of matter-energy” -or sometimes “the first law of thermodynamics” This law insists that we know of no mechanism, either present or past whereby the sum total of matter and energy in the universe may be changed by even one atom or one quanta of energy. One is forced in one of two directions when considering the implications of this law. For if it is true and unalterable, then either matter is eternal; that is it has always existed and always will exist in some form or another or else there must have been a cause behind it that lies outside of that creation itself; that is, some creative genius with powers beyond our wildest imaginations gave birth to it in His own time and way.

A second intriguing understanding of the physical world is the interchangeability of matter and energy. For we currently believe that universally there is a net movement of matter mass to forms of energy rather than the other way around. For example, if our understanding of what is happening in the sun is accurate, at this very moment there are tons of hydrogen atoms being pressed together to form helium in a process called fusion. Fusion of hydrogen atoms into helium nuclei is essentially a mechanism that converts matter to energy thus reducing the total amount of available hydrogen atoms in the universe. Now, note with carefulness the wording in Genesis 1:3 where God apparently begins the process by which the created atoms of the cosmic wasteland begin their transformation from matter to energy. That energy which was brought forth by the word of God would in time drive the engines of life under the command and direction of God.

Again, let us be clear. We speak of something quite different than natural processes. Herein we take issue with both the naturalist and the theistic evolutionist who allows that time and chance alone are capable of organizing random atomic structures into complex molecules capable of carrying on life processes. The Christian view is that of special creation complete with special processes known to God alone.

Incidentally, time is a player on the stage of creation. Even a strict construction of Genesis 1 understands this. Six days is six days of time. The Scriptures say that God worked during those 24-hour, six day periods of time. The creative mechanisms and processes are a mystery to us and I think shall always be so this side of heaven. Nevertheless, they existed and required at least 24 hours of time for six days in the creative hands of God to complete the work of creation. I say this not to support the search for creative evolutionary mechanisms at all. My point is that God worked in time and space to create.

If time is given a place in Genesis 1, what then of that twin conspirator, chance that many of the scientific community have come to worship? Well, let us first examine the nature of chance. Perhaps we will find a few clues there. Consider a scenario. A boy is about to flip a quarter. He places the quarter on his thumb and declares to those around him that according to what he is learning about chance and probability, there is a 50% chance that the quarter will come down heads and a 50% chance that it will come down tails. And so it does. After many tosses, the 50% prediction in either case is approximated and everyone agrees with him. But, he goes home and discovers that if he always turns the quarter with the date to 12:00 on his thumb, and flips it from that position, it turns out to consistently produce a 60% heads to 40% tails result. What has happened? He has learned something about one of the inputs that affects the way the quarter will come down. Apparently, in his case, the orientation of the quarter on his thumb is an important input to the outcome. But there are two things about the quarter's orientation to consider. The first is that the orientation input is only one variable among literally thousands and maybe even millions that factor into the final outcome. For example, another important input is the amount of moisture on his finger where his thumb is pressured in order to get the initial thrust to boost the coin into the air. But just as important as the thousands of additional possible inputs is his inability to perfect the input he thinks he does understand. For he can never set the quarter in the exact position it was the previous time. Perhaps it will be turned clockwise from its former position just .002 of a degree or maybe tilted .0001 degrees to the right rather than to the left. And so no matter what he does to make the situation more predictable, he can never get the coin to fall 100 times in a row without fail to heads up! There just are too many variables and he is not perfect. And so the illusion of chance continues.

But, now suppose we assemble a supercomputer that has the capability of analyzing and synthesizing 1,000 variables within one second after our boy places his quarter on his thumb. Clearly, this machine will be able to predict more accurately the outcomes time after time. It will still miss it sometimes because of additional inputs that are not a part of its database. What once appeared to be totally chance now becomes a rather predictable event. This is precisely the scenario with weather predicting. Before the era of

technology, the inputs involved were relatively unknown and what was known could not be analyzed rapidly enough to make accurate predictions. This scenario has changed with the advent of the computer. Now, millions of pieces of data can be processed and analyzed in seconds making tomorrow's weather report far more reliable.

Let's go one step further. Suppose that there is someone (not a computer) who is omniscient. This person can comprehend in a moment all of the variables that are involved with the quarter toss including the moisture in the air and the convection currents in the room. His knowledge is so complete that he perceives of the thoughts of the young lad even before he thinks them. To such a being there is no such thing as chance. All is completely comprehended and understood before it happens and as the coin flies through the air and even after it lands- all is understood. Such is the God of the Christians.

Well, now that we have examined the nature of chance, let us return to the question. What is its place in the creation and subsequently in the created order? I propose that chance as we understand it had little or nothing to do with intelligent design. Since our heavenly Father can comprehend all inputs infinitely in all directions simultaneously, chance is not in His vocabulary. It is all by purpose, plan, and design. However, I propose that chance, so called, "survival of the fittest", and natural selection or adaptation are **life preserving (not creative) mechanisms in a fallen world**. None of these three either alone or together, have demonstrated the ability to create organized life from chaos nor have they demonstrated ability to create a brand new gene configuration such as one would expect to find in speciation. The laws that govern them have demonstrated ability to **preserve** or **slow down** the deterioration of a given gene pool...or maybe even an ability to **alter** specific gene expressions that aid in survival, but that is all that it has demonstrated.

And so I propose that these supposed creative forces that have been set forth by the leading scientist in our day are understood in the Christian framework as preserving influences designed by God. Based on His absolute comprehension of history before it happened, He designed these life-preserving influences for a post-fall world. Yes...the fall meant death and so it shall be. No matter how you think of it, the second law of thermodynamics will prevail if we understand things correctly. But God in His "preserving mercy", gave space and time for the repentance of His crowning creation, man, and offered the Kingdom to him again through His son, Jesus Christ. This is the Gospel!

But we have run ahead of ourselves and have digressed enough. Let's return to the Biblical narrative and the theme of the Kingdom. For after the creation is complete, the Lord declares it very good, and then, He rests from His labors. This is foundational to understanding the unfolding purposes of God as His authority in His Kingdom is exercised on planet earth.

We move on in Genesis 1 to discover the specifics of what the Lord intended with this new and beautiful earth he has created. In Genesis 1:28 we find those purposes enumerated.

“Be fruitful, and multiply, and replenish the earth, and subdue it: and have dominion over the fish of the sea, and over the fowl of the air, and over every living thing that moveth upon the earth.” -Genesis 1:28

The question has been raised before and I raise it again. So, what if the human race had gotten off to a better start by refusing the “forbidden fruit” and had served God faithfully for the next 10,000 years? What would’ve happened? Again, we have no exhaustive answers but the question is worth exploring a bit. I think that we would have endlessly enjoyed the good earth (garden) that the Lord gave to us and that we would have found perpetual pleasure and holy productivity in life. I think that it would be accurate to say that we would have successfully been “fruitful and multiplied.” Consider this: Sexual pleasure for a committed husband and wife and the resultant “fruit of the womb” (family) is universally understood to be one of the most fulfilling long term experiences that life offers this side of heaven. This is understood even in a fallen world where serious distortion of sex and family life has occurred. But suppose now that sin had never been given opportunity to work its leaven and death on earth and life had been able to grow and blossom for 10,000 years as God intended for it to grow and blossom. What would life be like if physical intimacy was experienced free of the jealousies, intrigue, and foolishness that mark it in a fallen world? And what heights of joy would we receive if our children came to us and grew up mighty sons and daughters of God; all of them, and free of the curse of rebellion and alienation? Let us continue down this line of thought a little further. What if man’s dominion over nature as described in 1:28 had been free of the curse? Is it possible that under the dominion of men who were in true communion with their creator and capable of unfettered love, that the vast potential of the genetic pool in nature may have found expression through some different mechanism than the fierce competition that currently drives the engines of genetic expression. Ah, friends, I suspect that if we had not rebelled but had remained in faithful communion with our heavenly Father, the Kingdom of God would still be growing and expanding to fill the earth, and we would have only begun to explore the vast potential of life itself. The Biblical narrative seems to infer that life was sustainable indefinitely in this pre-fall world.

But...the FALL:

But this is not the course that history took. The Scriptures record that there was a day in which man fell from grace and subsequently the realization of the Kingdom of God was delayed. This story is recorded in Genesis, chapter 3. Christians refer to it as “the fall.” This event was truly cataclysmic and cosmic in nature. Certainly, the Creator wept!

Recently I read an editorial in a leading magazine of our day where the writer argues against teaching intelligent design in public education. In his argument, he touches on the possible role of science telling us much about God through the window of nature.

[Insert quote] As Christians we may agree with the writer in many ways. However, the truth is that our positions and understandings are miles apart. For the author by all appearances would not accept the Christian teaching about “the Fall” as historical reality. This is a huge difference with incredible consequences. The unbelieving research scientist holds nature, both terrestrial and cosmic, to be “sacred.” The record of the magic and ingenuity of time and chance have been faithfully recorded there and only needs to be discovered. Natural law somehow emerged in the evolution of things. And so, the “Bible” of reality is nature. This is precisely the philosophical position at the core of the New Age movement. Nature is God! This is unabashed pantheism and entirely in keeping with pagan religious practice. Of course, this position ignores the possibility of a “perverted” nature as is set forth in the Scriptures. **The Christian position is that we live in a fallen world.** This means that nature reflects truth about its Creator and thus is worthy of study. But nature cannot be trusted as having final authority in any area. It cannot be trusted because its real existence today is not as God originally designed it. All indications are that the Garden of Eden was a place of tranquility and peaceful co-existence. The holy presence of God walking with Adam and Eve in the cool of the day was sufficient resource for all nature. There was no need for competition, hoarding, or strife. The work of tending the garden was pleasant, significant, and rewarding. Work was sweet. But all this changed when man chose to rebel against his creator. The change was catastrophic. A dark and gloomy shadow fell over what God had made. The truth had been perverted and all of nature with it. Murder, rape, incest, war, and unbearable tensions of nature broke out everywhere. It appeared that all was lost and would go up in smoke.

But remember, “*The earth is the Lord’s and the fullness thereof.*” He had already assessed the damage, and put into motion first a contingency plan to suppress the full affect of evil, and second, a final solution to destroy the power of evil itself. Ultimately He would usher in the Kingdom of heaven. The contingency plan would involve the **preserving forces inherent in the creation** and the establishment of **authority** to suppress evil. The second component was more far-reaching. In it he would raise up a **redeemer** who would set the captive free and destroy the power of evil.

Preserving a Fallen World:

“*The wages of sin is death*”-so the Bible records. If the Lord had abandoned the earth to the devices of Satan it would have become a total hell in and of itself. I do not think that the human race has ever experienced the total withdrawal of grace. We cannot imagine the horror of a graceless world. The worst of horror movies could not hold a candle to such a scene. But the Lord did not abandon us in spite of our sin and rebellion. He set in motion events that would make life possible if painful on earth. It would not self-destruct. The Bible records that following the expulsion of Adam and Eve from Eden, there was rapid and incredible deterioration. Eventually, the earth was full of evil with only a small handful of people in favor with God- “Noah found grace in the eyes of the Lord.” And so it came to pass that there was a great flood and a total reordering of things. The postdiluvian world was greeted with a rainbow promising that the Lord would not again destroy all of life with a flood and that man should set up governments

(centers of authority) to reward the good and punish the evil thus suppressing the full affects of evil. The basis for this argument is in Genesis 9:5-6.

“And surely your blood of your lives will I require; at the hand of every beast will I require it, and at the hand of man; at the hand of every man's brother will I require the life of man. 6. Whoso sheddeth man's blood, by man shall his blood be shed: for in the image of God made he man.”

(KJV)

The commandment was given and the pattern set. Sin and oppression was not to go unpunished. Evil in the postdiluvian world would be suppressed by an “eye for an eye and a tooth for a tooth” judicial system. No system of government was prescribed. Nevertheless, the responsibility was made clear. And so it appears that in Genesis chapter 10 cities have their beginning and governments take shape.

This is why the Christian respects the place of government. **It was commanded of the Lord.** By inference man was also charged with making a difference between the good and the evil. This became the place of **laws.** For laws prescribed an acceptable way to live in community, gave definition to good and evil and laid out a course of action when laws were broken. Good laws always uphold the good and suppress the evil. Bad laws make space for the promulgation of evil.

Let us be clear. The establishment of authority does not resolve the problem of sin and evil. It mitigates the effects of evil and holds down or suppresses its destructive nature. This remains the Christian view of government- a fundamentally positive view that understands authority to be ordained of God for the purposes that have already been cited...namely the suppression of evil and the promotion of the good. Of course the issues can become very complex. Government offices, places of authority, are held by fallen men and women; and many of them are in open rebellion against the Lord. Though government is ordained of God, it is nowhere close to perfect. In fact much is perverted; nevertheless the net affect worldwide is the suppression of evil. Our late president, Ronald Reagan, declared the USSR an “evil empire,” and perhaps he had a good reason to say so. But, still one is amazed to hear testimony coming from Eastern Europe lauding the days when open prostitution was prohibited and public pornography banned. My point here is not an attempt to exonerate the repressive communist regimes of the era but to point out that even the “evil empire” functioned to suppress evil in many ways. I am well aware that this same government also suppressed the name of Christ and often stretched forth the hand of persecution. It is my contention that when governments are placed in the balance and come up wanting, the internal seeds of their demise have already been sown. This ought to give us pause. The Western world has come to legally sanction mass murder in the form of abortion. This is nothing short of a holocaust. It is one thing for a government to at least frown and work hard to suppress such a decadent thing. It is quite another to legally sanction such and provide funding and the like to facilitate such sinful practices. I contend that the seeds of disintegration have already been sown in Western governments. Unless there is massive repentance such as occurred

in the case of enforced slavery, surely this thing alone will bring us down from our exalted place.

Before leaving this point, let us explore briefly the methods employed by governments to suppress evil. If we draw from the commands given to Noah as he emerged from the ark, we note immediately the exercise of capital punishment. The methods of the governments can be comprehended in a few simple words. The first is “the sword” or generalized to mean “force or coercion.” Governments are authorized to use force even to the point of execution. Governments, I say, are given such authorization, not Christians. Herein, we find the historical Christian reluctance to enter the realm of politics and the subsequent implications of the employed methods.

This raises to conscious level the “two-kingdom” model of life on earth. The lines are drawn by Jesus in His notable conversation with Pilate. –

John 18:36 Jesus answered, My kingdom is not of this world: if my kingdom were of this world, then would my servants fight, that I should not be delivered to the Jews: but now is my kingdom not from hence.

We Christians are often perplexed by the “two-kingdom model.” On one hand, we are instructed that government is ordained of God and that we are to obey them that have the rule over us. By contrast, we discover that Jesus does not find common cause whatsoever with the “kingdoms of this world.” How then are we to think of this?

Well, let us return to an earlier line of thought. We proposed that certain mechanisms of life and government were introduced into the *post-fall* world by God Himself as **preserving** influences to give space for mankind to repent and for the Kingdom of God to come in power and glory. The “kingdoms of this world” play a major role in this post-fall preserving action. They play by the rules of a fallen world. Power, force, conflict, competition, violence, and more are the rules by which a fallen world plays its game. In a fallen world it seems that the only protection against madmen like Adolf Hitler or Joseph Stalin is guns and ammunition. Is it safe to say that the Lord preserved or extended the days of western civilization by raising an Allied army to bring the Nazi regime down? In my opinion, at best the kingdoms of this world are preservative in nature; at worse, since they are managed by fallen men, they may contribute to the deterioration.

And so Jesus distances Himself from the kingdoms of this world, not because they play no part in the plan of God, but because they act on the basis of the preserving rules of a fallen world rather than the eternal life-giving principles that guide the action in the Kingdom of God. By implication then, when one chooses the kingdoms of this world he has chosen to cooperate with the principles that govern the affairs of a fallen world. At best he participates in the preserving aspects of that kingdom, but he cannot participate in the redeeming qualities of the Kingdom of God.

Exploring the Mechanism of History: (Nash's 2nd Question)

As we have previously noted, a basic assumption held by orthodox Christians is that the building blocks (matter- atoms, molecules, space) of the universe were created by God with Jesus Christ present and active in that creation. It was pronounced good, yea very good by the Creator. This infers that evil was not a part of creation but was introduced into the created order by an imposter with the permission of a sovereign God. We are not given extensive insight into the reasons behind that permission. Some insights are offered to us from the Scripture either directly or indirectly. The medium that introduced evil was Satan disguised as a serpent. Most Bible scholars view Isaiah 14:12-20 and Ezekiel 28:11-19 to be references to the origin and history of Satan or Lucifer. If this perspective is true then we find Satan to be a created being from an era and world apart from the present created order and are left to ponder even further the origin and nature of evil.

Perhaps the most significant clarifying passage on the origin and nature of evil is in John 8:42-45. (Read the entire chapter for the context.)

John 8:42. Jesus said unto them, If God were your Father, ye would love me: for I proceeded forth and came from God; neither came I of myself, but he sent me.

43. Why do ye not understand my speech? even because ye cannot hear my word.

44. Ye are of your father the devil, and the lusts of your father ye will do. He was a murderer from the beginning, and abode not in the truth, because there is no truth in him. When he speaketh a lie, he speaketh of his own: for he is a liar, and the father of it.

45. And because I tell you the truth, ye believe me not.

The passage is very instructive. Listen to some of the pertinent points: 1. "...he was a murderer from the beginning" –John 8:44 2. "...he is a liar and the father of it" -John 8:44 The implications here are phenomenal. The core of evil is the LIE! The end of the LIE is death. (He is a murderer) And what is the LIE? A lie is anything that distorts reality. **Note carefully then that it is not the material world that is evil, rather at the very core of evil is the LIE that is told about the material world and by implication, spiritual reality as well.** And so the true nature of things is twisted and distorted. The great tragedy here is that human beings have the capacity to accommodate their perception of reality to such a degree that they are both deaf and blind to reality and even come to believe a lie while maintaining rational integrity. Rational integrity couched in a lie is deadly to the soul and society.

The First Lie:

It may be argued that the greatest lie that has been told in the last two centuries is that time and chance alone have conspired to produce the cell and subsequently all forms of life, and all of this from matter which apparently has eternal existence. This lie is very pernicious and has overthrown the faith of many. So deadly is it, that a madman by the

name of Adolf Hitler thrust his nation and the entire world into a holocaust because he believed and acted upon the two pillars of Darwinian thought—the survival of the fittest and natural selection. Hitler seriously believed that the “laws” set forth by Darwinian evolution were and are the engines of cosmic progress. Survival of the fittest and natural selection are credited with moving the cosmos relentlessly forward toward a perfected species and a better day in spite of the absence of any clear evidence. He merely acted consistently with the lie that was being taught in the universities of the civilized world. Clearly, the error of seeing these laws as being creative rather than preservative is catastrophic.

A Second Lie:

There is an equally pernicious lie that has been exploited by the “father of lies” in various forms since time immortal. Sometimes it postures itself as being religious in nature. Sometimes it even accepts the idea that the cosmos is not eternal and that there was a creative moment somewhere in the distant past. Sometimes it is romantically pantheistic; simply making the claim that nature is God and God is nature. But always, no matter what language is used or what posture is assumed, it denies Jehovah God His rightful ownership of the created order. Its aim is always to separate God from the material world that came forth in the beginning when He spoke it into existence.

Of particular interest to us is the religious side of this lie. Historically, the Gnostics of the early Church era were dualist. They were dualist in that they believed there were two creators, the one good and the other evil. The good God created the spiritual world which in their minds was simply the non-material world. The evil god through a complicated series of events created the material world as an antithesis of the good God’s work. History is a massive face-off for supremacy between these two gods. There are other details but they are unimportant to the discussion at this point. The heretical lie in this system successfully separates Jehovah God from the world He created and subsequently turns the material world of matter and energy into something that is intrinsically evil because of its origins. This is a complete denial of the word of God.

Ps 24:1 The earth is the LORD'S, and the fulness thereof; the world, and they that dwell therein.

Ps 89:11 The heavens are thine, the earth also is thine: as for the world and the fulness thereof, thou hast founded them.

Gnosticism typically expressed itself in one of two major ways; either extreme asceticism or total abandonment to the legitimate and illegitimate passions of the flesh.

The case of extreme asceticism is easy to comprehend, because if the material world was created by an evil god then it must be intrinsically evil. And if the world of matter and energy is evil then too our bodies must be evil. So, if our bodies are evil then they must

be dealt with harshly so that the inner spirit which is good can be delivered. There were many variations of this idea but none of them gave space for people to enjoy the good earth that the Lord created. Incidentally, the book of I John is aimed directly at this heresy because one obvious Gnostic conclusion was that Jesus Christ could not have had a real physical body. How could he be perfect as the Scriptures claimed if he paraded about in a real body made up of flesh and blood? John counters with:

1Jo 4:2 Hereby know ye the Spirit of God: Every spirit that confesseth that Jesus Christ is come in the flesh is of God:

3 And every spirit that confesseth not that Jesus Christ is come in the flesh is not of God: and this is that spirit of antichrist, whereof ye have heard that it should come; and even now already is it in the world.

John correctly understood the significance of the issue. The incarnation was monumental in a number of ways. One of those was that God Himself took on a body of flesh and blood, made up of atoms and molecules, and behold His perfectness was not marred or altered at all. Perhaps he accepted some restrictions that his pre-incarnate body did not have and maybe he experienced hitherto unknown temptations, but the point still stands that his being as a deity, the son of God, was not violated by his material body. Some could not accept that possibility so they fabricated the lie that the body of Christ was spirit and not flesh and blood. This is the heresy of Gnosticism. John absolutely rebukes them for this heresy.

One is absolutely awed by the interaction between the “flesh and blood, Jesus” and the material world which he had created. Consider these passages.

John 6:8 One of his disciples, Andrew, Simon Peter's brother, saith unto him,

9 There is a lad here, which hath five barley loaves, and two small fishes: but what are they among so many?

10 And Jesus said, Make the men sit down. Now there was much grass in the place. So the men sat down, in number about five thousand.

11 And Jesus took the loaves; and when he had given thanks, he distributed to the disciples, and the disciples to them that were set down; and likewise of the fishes as much as they would.

12 When they were filled, he said unto his disciples, Gather up the fragments that remain, that nothing be lost.

13 Therefore they gathered them together, and filled twelve baskets with the fragments of the five barley loaves, which remained over and above unto them that had eaten.

14 Then those men, when they had seen the miracle that Jesus did, said, This is of a truth that prophet that should come into the world.

Mt 8:23 And when he was entered into a ship, his disciples followed him.

24 And, behold, there arose a great tempest in the sea, insomuch that the ship was covered with the waves: but he was asleep.

25 And his disciples came to him, and awoke him, saying, Lord, save us: we perish.

26 And he saith unto them, Why are ye fearful, O ye of little faith? Then he arose, and rebuked the winds and the sea; and there was a great calm.

27 But the men marveled, saying, What manner of man is this, that even the winds and the sea obey him!

John 2:1 And the third day there was a marriage in Cana of Galilee; and the mother of Jesus was there:

2 And both Jesus was called, and his disciples, to the marriage.

3 And when they wanted wine, the mother of Jesus saith unto him, They have no wine.

4 Jesus saith unto her, Woman, what have I to do with thee? mine hour is not yet come.

5 His mother saith unto the servants, Whatsoever he saith unto you, do it.

6 And there were set there six waterpots of stone, after the manner of the purifying of the Jews, containing two or three firkins apiece.

7 Jesus saith unto them, Fill the waterpots with water. And they filled them up to the brim.

8 And he saith unto them, Draw out now, and bear unto the governor of the feast. And they bare it.

9 When the ruler of the feast had tasted the water that was made wine, and knew not whence it was: (but the servants which drew the water knew;) the governor of the feast called the bridegroom,

10 And saith unto him, Every man at the beginning doth set forth good wine; and when men have well drunk, then that which is worse: but thou hast kept the good wine until now.

11 This beginning of miracles did Jesus in Cana of Galilee, and manifested forth his glory; and his disciples believed on him

Clearly, the incarnate Emmanuel is quite at home in the world he has created. There is not a hint of “uncleanness” in Jesus’ attitude toward the created material world. Let us press the point just a bit harder. Perhaps Adam and his descendents would have routinely rebuked or called forth the wind or the sunshine to accomplish good purposes if they had not fallen from their place of authority in Paradise. Or from another angle, one should remember that we are Christians, little Christ. We too are called to interact with the good earth that our heavenly Father has created. We too are called upon to pray the prayer “*Thy will be done on earth as it is in heaven...*” and to order our lives and actions on the basis of such prayers. Of course, we are not Jesus Christ. We have not and could not be called to the same mission of salvation to all men that he was called to. However, he is our example in word and action and we ought to follow him in life and do as he did. Without making bold statements about miracles and the like, I think it is safe to say that we too should be at home in our Father’s world finding it possible to sleep in the back of the boat even as it threatens to go under the deep dark waves.

The tenor of the Gospels suggests that Jesus enjoyed good food with his friends and neighbors-

Mt 11:19 The Son of man came eating and drinking, and they say, Behold a man gluttonous, and a winebibber, a friend of publicans and sinners. But wisdom is justified of her children.

Lu 7:34 The Son of man is come eating and drinking; and ye say, Behold a gluttonous man, and a winebibber, a friend of publicans and sinners!

The purpose in citing these passages and making these points is not to open a door to wanton worship and feeding of the flesh. We are repeatedly warned in the epistles concerning the deadliness of fleshly living. The purpose is to affirm the notion that the intrinsic pleasures built into the created order may be enjoyed with the knowledge that our Father is happy when we are pleased and grateful for the gifts that He has so graciously given us. After-all, I suppose He could've created a little orifice in our bodies somewhere to receive a little grass periodically without giving us the pleasure of good tasting food and drink. But this is not what he did. Isn't he a good Father?

The other path of Gnosticism...

But not all Gnostics took the path of extreme asceticism. They agreed with the basic assumptions of all Gnostics, particularly the dualism that viewed the material world as evil. This led them to the same place concerning the deity of Christ. He could not have been real flesh and blood. Not knowing then what to do with the impossibility of their own evil fleshly desires they built a dichotomy in which they simply abandoned themselves to the power of fleshly passion while simultaneously claiming a relationship with the true good God in the Spirit. Ah...this is beginning to sound just a little familiar. Modern Christian thought offers a similar dichotomy. One has the impression that as long as the books are straight all is well. Since my name is written in the book of life because of the substitutionary work of Christ and I have accepted this work by faith, then I can do whatever my flesh jolly well pleases and still go to heaven. The acts of the material world in my flesh are immaterial to personal salvation in this system of thought. The wall though man-made is complete; the division secured by selected Scriptural passages that seem to support the idea. This dichotomy of thought explains why it is possible for a lady to stand up in the congregation with a radiant smile and a brilliant testimony in the morning, then turn right around and race to the beaches in the afternoon, parade around in front of gaping, gawking men who also offered a brilliant testimony in the early morning service, and then to put the icing on the cake spend the fading hours of the day in bed with a man who is not her husband (she is divorced and remarried)...and still the testimony of God's saving grace remains on her lips.

To be fair we must say that few preachers in the evangelical world would actually preach a gospel like I just described. Many of them do preach a message of holy living. But one suspects that still the false dichotomy remains. The curse of the flesh will prevail in daily life. Holy living in the flesh is in the end not realistic in this system of thought.

But John does not agree with this. The life of Christ stands as a mighty testimony against it for he came in the flesh, was tempted from every angle by the tempter yet was absolutely victorious. He is the supreme example of the proper interface between the

material world and the spiritual world demonstrating the power of God moving in and through a body of atoms and molecules. Life is really seamless. He begs us to follow in his footsteps as his sons and daughters. We too can be at home in our Father's world living lives that are victorious over sins of the flesh while we enjoy the good gifts he has given us.

This lie about the physical universe illustrated by the two paths of classical Gnosticism has robbed the Church of holy abundant living in Christ Jesus in this life. I return to my thesis. I think our preoccupation with personal salvation rather than the Kingdom of God has made it possible to side-step some serious questions about Christian thought and practice in our day.

But let us not lose sight of the important point here. We are exonerating the created world (matter and life) from being intrinsically evil at its core. We are doing this by identifying the source of evil to be from a spiritual entity that once was in harmony with his Creator but fell from grace when he set himself up against that Creator. He has perpetuated his blackened soul by entering into the cosmos armed with his chief weapon, the lie (a distortion of everything that is true), and has relentlessly pursued murder (the crushing of life) as his chief pleasure. The cosmos has been devastated as a result.

Let us summarize a bit. At the core of evil is the LIE. The first component of the LIE concerns origins. The LIE rejects the Creator and embraces time and chance as the "creator" while ignoring the source of the material with which time and chance supposedly will dance life into existence. The second component of the LIE is that the twin engines of "survival of the fittest" and "natural selection" are credited with moving the cosmos relentlessly forward toward a perfected species and a better day in spite of the absence of any clear evidence that this is the case. These lies are intended by Satan to separate the human race and all of creation from the reality of their creator and His historic intention of establishing his rule and reign on the earth. It would be difficult to refute these lies if it were not for Jesus Christ, the incarnate God, who came in the flesh demonstrating the possibility of an abundant life in the Kingdom under the rule of God on earth today. Truly he deserves our worship.

The Mechanism of History:

This sets the stage for Nash's second question: **What is the mechanism of history?** Another form of this question is- What is the primary energy behind the cosmos; the driving force that trumps all other forces? It is quite fascinating to say the least to see where historians have come out on this point. For if the scholar ignores the Biblical account of creation and the Biblio-historical account of the Fall, he has only a few places to turn to look for the mechanism of history. He often turns to nature. We have already given this perspective some attention and have found it wanting. But let us be honest. If nature alone is the source of truth, then we are forced to consider Darwinian evolutionary

thought as being a credible answer... though I will still insist that no evidence exists to demonstrate its supposed creative and advancing qualities.

Freud saw the innate drive to reproduce or the “sexuality” of life to be the baseline engine that moves life forward. Karl Marx was convinced that history is the story of the struggle between the “haves” and the “have-nots” or class conflict. His observations were more socio-economical than biological but are still derived from observing the nature of human beings while ignoring the truth of Scripture.

Well, what about the Christian? How do we answer the question “What is the mechanism of history?” If we are Bible believers at all, I think we must answer with one word—LOVE! But this answer seems like nonsense when confronted with the apparent realities of life. No matter how we crunch the data, nature screams and insists that we join the mad struggle for survival or perish. This scream is so loud that often, even Christians succumb and take up arms to fight the enemy, or demand their rights, or even protect their personal property to the death in spite of the truth that Jesus forbade such action. To make matters worse many horrific events have happened in history in the name of love itself. Ulrich Zwingli’s baseline argument for executing Anabaptists was that he loved them!

But still this is the right answer and the Biblical answer. Let us examine this more deeply. The greatest event in the history of the world was the incarnation of God in Christ Jesus and the story that unfolded around him. This is the supreme manifestation of the love of God and stands as the benchmark by which love is defined and understood by the Christian. At the center of the incarnation of God in Christ are two events that mark out the mechanism of history in a fallen world. **The first is the cross, representative of the truest expression of love in a fallen world.**

*John 15:13 Greater love hath no man than this, that a man lay down his life for his friends.
(KJV)*

The second is the resurrection that confirms the final triumph of suffering love and establishes love as the motive energy that drives the cosmos.

If these things are so, the implications are incredible. We are first putting forth the idea that love has been and will always be the most basic source of creative cosmic energy. It was present in the triune God before history had its birth. Remember, John’s statement—God is love! Paradise was a place where love was exercised free of the curse of sin. It was the paradigm out of which the spirit of cooperation and symbiotic relationships grew and prospered. It is worse than tragic that the world had little chance to see what the Kingdom of Heaven would have looked like had this state of perfectness continued for millennia. But man had fallen from grace and a usurper had brought his “tools” of fear and the torment of death to enslave the peoples of the earth. This sad state of affairs did not alter the purposes of God to establish a Kingdom on earth that would be governed by love. Love though was not welcome in this new post-fall order where fear, drunkenness,

murder, rape, and all manner of lewdness ruled in the hearts of men. **Love, still the basic motive of all took on the expression of suffering love or redemptive love in a fallen world.** This would be the keynote of the coming Kingdom and when exercised by the people of God, living in a fallen world, would indeed introduce order into chaos. Perhaps the greatest act of faith is to act and live with the confidence that suffering love is truly the dynamic mechanism of the entire cosmos.

This perspective answers a lot of questions. It speaks to the two kingdom concept of life before God. Our belief that the Church of Jesus Christ is the present active Kingdom of God on earth today and that it is fundamentally different than the Kingdoms of this world is given substance in the way we answer this question- "What is the mechanism of history"? Their answer is read from the book of nature and no matter what form it takes, always calls for violence, coercion, or manipulation to be the mechanism. By way of contrast, the Kingdom of Heaven as ushered in by the Lamb of God says- You can't be farther from the truth! **Suffering love is the mechanism by which a truly redemptive process may begin in a fallen world...and this redemption is both restorative and creative.** Herein lies the philosophical base of the two kingdom conception of life on earth. In concrete terms it describes why the weapons of our warfare are not carnal. We truly believe that those carnal weapons of destruction cannot possibly move us forward; perhaps in the sovereign hand of God they may be used to preserve something, but never to restore or create. But the way of love as understood in the cross of Christ is truly redemptive and points the way forward for the human race toward the day in which Christ will reign supreme.

A clear example of this is the Anabaptist of the 16th century. They steadfastly insisted that religious conviction could not be coerced. They were convinced that there should be a clear separation of church and state. They taught that governments should not dictate the religion of the people and that nobody should be executed for what they believe. All historians know that many of them suffered martyrdom because of their beliefs and their willingness to practice what they believed. As their blood was soaked up by the soils of Old Europe, the roots of the idea went deeper and deeper fed by their suffering love...even for their enemies. For the most part they refused to take up arms against their enemies, steadfastly standing by the principals of the Kingdom of God. They were guided by the Sermon on the Mount. I contend that it was the divine energy of this suffering love that energized the political debates of the following centuries. Nobody in the 16th century would have dreamed that by the 19th century, the Jew, the Gentile, the Moslem, the agnostic, and even the atheist would live peaceably and respectfully as neighbors in many parts of Western civilization. I ask a simple question. Could this have happened had it not been for the cross-bearing of the Christians in that era? I think not. Based on the Scripture-in particular the example of Christ and the example of suffering Christians throughout the centuries, I declare that the real mechanism of history in a fallen world is suffering love. The supreme example of this truth that rises out of the ashes of time is the cross of Jesus Christ. He calls His followers to the same.

Musings on the Pattern of History:

Nash asked the question, “What is the pattern of history?” and walks us through the thoughts of the great thinkers of history. As a Christian he holds the position that history is linear, that is, it had a beginning and it is moving relentlessly toward an endpoint. It is not cyclical or linear-cyclical. Well, if he is right there is an obvious question- **Where is it headed?** Or maybe a more pertinent question is- **Where are we at on the time-line as of today?**

To answer these questions, I first remind you of our basic thesis- **The central theme of Scripture and history is the Kingdom of God.** The Scriptures open with acts of creation and the Kingdom of God present on the earth with Adam responsible as a coregent of the Lord’s. Disaster breaks upon the scene with Eve being deceived by the serpent and the subsequent results. The Scriptures close with the assurance that God will have His way. There will be a new heaven and a new earth wherein dwelleth righteousness. Where is history headed? **It is headed toward the full-realization of the Kingdom of God on earth.** The prayer of Jesus will be answered. The will of God will be done on earth even as it is in heaven. The Scripture bears testimony to this reality repeatedly. Certainly, we acknowledge that there are components of this procession in time that are mysterious. We do not understand everything...perhaps we understand very little.

But we have the record of the New Testament. We have some important information about where we are at on the timeline and the purposes of God for our day.

It is clear from the language of the New Testament that the Kingdom of heaven was imminent, that is, it was about to break forth upon planet earth.

Consider these passages:

Mt 4:17 From that time Jesus began to preach, and to say, Repent: for the kingdom of heaven is at hand.

Mt 10:7 And as ye go, preach, saying, The kingdom of heaven is at hand.

Mr 1:14 Now after that John was put in prison, Jesus came into Galilee, preaching the gospel of the kingdom of God,

Mr 1:15 And saying, The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God is at hand: repent ye, and believe the gospel.

Mr 9:1 And he said unto them, Verily I say unto you, That there be some of them that stand here, which shall not taste of death, till they have seen the kingdom of God come with power.

Lu 16:16 The law and the prophets were until John: since that time the kingdom of God is preached, and every man presseth into it.

The emphasis on the present Kingdom is affirmed in Luke’s epistle,

Luke 12:32 “Fear not little flock, it is the Father’s good pleasure to give you the Kingdom.”

This passage is powerfully positive. The rule and reign of our heavenly Father through His resurrected and exalted Son is very near and dear to the heart of Jehovah God. The great invitation given in Matthew 11:28-30 is a personal invitation to the individual to find rest and peace in God. We typically think of these verses as applicable to a **present** personal call to salvation. Luke 12:32 by contrast seems to be a corporate call to the people of God to come and receive the gift of the Kingdom from the hands of our heavenly Father. I take this to be present tense.

We understand Luke 12:32 to be present tense and for the key ideas in the Lord’s Prayer to be a daily reality for this present era and not some distant far-off period of time. No doubt there are aspects/components of the Kingdom that will continually unfold before us even as the “years of eternity” roll on. Certain passages from the Old Testament and the New Testament seem to indicate future aspects of the Kingdom of God. **The purpose of this essay is not to explore chapters of the future Kingdom but rather the Lord’s intention to rule and reign today in our families, churches, and communities.** What are the current implications of the Kingdom? How shall we order our lives in light of these implications? How does a Kingdom orientation differ from a personal salvation orientation? What are the keys to the Kingdom? The questions are innumerable but at least a few things are clear.

The CHURCH: Present Expression of the Kingdom of God

Jesus speaking in Matthew 16 clearly connects the church and the kingdom of heaven.

Mt 16:16 And Simon Peter answered and said, Thou art the Christ, the Son of the living God.

17 And Jesus answered and said unto him, Blessed art thou, Simon Barjona: for flesh and blood hath not revealed it unto thee, but my Father which is in heaven.

*18 And I say also unto thee, That thou art Peter, and upon this rock I will build my **church**; and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it.*

*19 And I will give unto thee **the keys of the kingdom of heaven**: and whatsoever thou shalt bind on earth shall be bound in heaven: and whatsoever thou shalt loose on earth shall be loosed in heaven.*

The language of Scripture does not seem to equate “the Kingdom of God (heaven)” directly and unequivocally with the Church in every case. However it is clear in the passage cited that Jesus inseparably links the kingdom of heaven with the building of the Church in His classic response to Peter. I think it is accurate to say that the Kingdom of God (heaven) is in a sense a larger concept than the Church, but I do not think you can speak of the Church as an entity apart from the Kingdom of God (heaven).

[It may be noted here that I do not think there is a significant difference between the “Kingdom of God” and the “Kingdom of heaven.” It is true that the phrase “Kingdom of

heaven” is used exclusively by Matthew. But there are numerous places in the Gospels where one writer uses “Kingdom of God” in a parallel passage where another uses “Kingdom of heaven.” I think it quite difficult to create a definitive difference between the two.]

At any rate, it is my firm conviction that the present physical manifestation of the Kingdom of God on earth today is the Church of Jesus Christ. Where are the principles of the Kingdom being worked out and lived? -Certainly in the Church, the body of Christ.

Paul, in his letter to the Ephesians waxes eloquent in helping us to see the grandeur of the work of God in the Church. Consider these passages...

*Eph 1:20 Which he wrought in Christ, when he raised him from the dead, and set him at his own right hand in the heavenly places,
21 Far above all principality, and power, and might, and dominion, and every name that is named, not only in this world, but also in that which is to come:
22 And hath put all things under his feet, and gave him to be the head over all things to the church,
23 Which is his body, the fulness of him that filleth all in all.*

*Eph 2:19 Now therefore ye are no more strangers and foreigners, but fellowcitizens with the saints, and of the household of God;
20 And are built upon the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Jesus Christ himself being the chief corner stone;
21 In whom all the building fitly framed together groweth unto an holy temple in the Lord:
22 In whom ye also are builded together for an habitation of God through the Spirit.
(KJV)*

*Eph 3:9 And to make all men see what is the fellowship of the mystery, which from the beginning of the world hath been hid in God, who created all things by Jesus Christ:
10 To the intent that now unto the principalities and powers in heavenly places might be known by the church the manifold wisdom of God,
11 According to the eternal purpose which he purposed in Christ Jesus our Lord:
12 In whom we have boldness and access with confidence by the faith of him.*

Eph 3:21 Unto him be glory in the church by Christ Jesus throughout all ages, world without end. Amen.

Verse 10 of chapter 3 is nothing less than awesome in its description of the Church. The wisdom of God himself is to be found in the Church of Jesus Christ. The “principalities and powers”, speaking of the angels and perhaps devils, gaze with wonder upon the gathered body of believers in an attempt to comprehend the “manifold wisdom of God.”

I personally do not encourage the young philosopher to go to the local university to find the “truth” about life. I do not think it is there! To discover the essence of life my council is to find a functioning, alive, body of believers and to there make personal judgment of what is true and right.

We live in an era when the Church of Jesus Christ is much maligned. I am amazed at how serious Christians often stand in awe of the invisible worldwide church but simultaneously and consistently have little respect for the local body of believers that they belong to. This is tragic to say the least!

It would be quite dishonest of us to act as if the visible Church was one grand success story from the day of Pentecost until this very hour. Certainly our integrity would be at stake if we ignored the problems that beset the Church and almost daily embarrass us. But on the other hand, we do ourselves a great disservice when we consistently engage in church-bashing. We are speaking of the body of Christ and should not find it easy to daily malign its work. Recently, I was engaged in conversation with a young Polish university trained journalist. As we talked over coffee in a downtown café, the conversation ranged from politics to economics to warfare and beyond. He stated his agnostic-socialist position. I labored hard to give him a “Kingdom perspective” of the issues. His questions were fast and furious to say the least. In particular he wanted to know how we Mennonites worked these principles out on the ground where the “rubber hits the road.” It was a long animated discussion. I was astounded when a few days later he greeted me with the words- “The Mennonites are the future of the world.” Of course I took his statement spoken in halting English with a grain of salt. But as we continued our discussion it was clear that he had been moved by the principles of the Kingdom that we had spoken of over a cup of coffee. My point is simple. The basic ideas of the Kingdom of heaven as outlined by the Lord Jesus in the Sermon on the Mount present a compelling vision that is capable of moving the hearts of modern man.

What then is the problem? Why are people not flocking to the Kingdom? The problem is two-fold. First, there are precious few examples to turn toward where these principles are being taught and lived with consistency. For example, only a very small percentage of professing Christians take the words of Jesus concerning love for enemies literally and seriously. This is a serious omission at best and a fatal disobedience at worst. David Bercot speaks extensively to this point in his book, *The Kingdom the Turned the World Upside Down*. Second, I return to a major concern of this essay. The evangelical preoccupation with personal salvation and the strange maneuverings and explanations designed to secure that salvation painlessly has obscured the message of the Kingdom and the timeless principles thereof.

I think it quite impossible to emphasize the Kingdom of God properly without promoting a high view of the Church of Jesus Christ both locally and world-wide. My heart yearns within me when I think of present possibilities in that wonderful statement from Jesus- “Fear not little flock, it is the Father’s good pleasure to give you the Kingdom.” It is high time for us to stop our bickering and complaining about what is wrong with the Church

and to get serious about teaching and practicing the principles of the Kingdom. Listen to Paul as he calls us to this vision:

Ro 8:17 ¶ And if children, then heirs; heirs of God, and joint-heirs with Christ; if so be that we suffer with him, that we may be also glorified together.

18 For I reckon that the sufferings of this present time are not worthy to be compared with the glory which shall be revealed in us.

19 For the earnest expectation of the creature waiteth for the manifestation of the sons of God.

20 For the creature was made subject to vanity, not willingly, but by reason of him who hath subjected the same in hope,

21 Because the creature itself also shall be delivered from the bondage of corruption into the glorious liberty of the children of God.

22 For we know that the whole creation groaneth and travaileth in pain together until now.

23 And not only they, but ourselves also, which have the firstfruits of the Spirit, even we ourselves groan within ourselves, waiting for the adoption, to wit, the redemption of our body.

24 For we are saved by hope: but hope that is seen is not hope: for what a man seeth, why doth he yet hope for?

25 But if we hope for that we see not, then do we with patience wait for it.

I think it is proper to understand Paul to be writing with an eye toward the future. However, I think the idea that he presents is quite applicable in the here and now. The creation (creature) that still functions under the influence of the curse longs for the sons of God to rise up and declare the presence of the Kingdom in life and practice just as Jesus did when he walked on planet earth in a body composed of flesh and blood. Though it appears that the full realization of this is yet to come, I believe that there is a present reality of the same in the era of time in which we now live. It is time for the people of God to preach repentance because the Kingdom of heaven is at hand. These propositions lived out in a fallen, cruel world will certainly mean suffering and cross-bearing. But the manifestation of the sons of God truly is the future of the world.

THE KINGDOM PARABLES

It would seem strange to submit an essay on the Kingdom of God and omit the numerous times that Jesus spoke a parable to his disciples in an effort to open their eyes to the reality of the Kingdom of God. He makes it clear that an understanding of the Kingdom is not available to everybody. Note his words:

Lu 8:10 And he said, Unto you it is given to know the mysteries of the kingdom of God: but to others in parables; that seeing they might not see, and hearing they might not understand.

Joh 3:3 Jesus answered and said unto him, Verily, verily, I say unto thee, Except a man be born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God.

Mt 13:10 And the disciples came, and said unto him, Why speakest thou unto them in parables?

*11 He answered and said unto them, **Because it is given unto you to know the mysteries of the kingdom of heaven, but to them it is not given.***

12 For whosoever hath, to him shall be given, and he shall have more abundance: but whosoever hath not, from him shall be taken away even that he hath.

13 Therefore speak I to them in parables: because they seeing see not; and hearing they hear not, neither do they understand.

14 And in them is fulfilled the prophecy of Esaias, which saith, By hearing ye shall hear, and shall not understand; and seeing ye shall see, and shall not perceive:

15 For this people's heart is waxed gross, and their ears are dull of hearing, and their eyes they have closed; lest at any time they should see with their eyes, and hear with their ears, and should understand with their heart, and should be converted, and I should heal them.

16 But blessed are your eyes, for they see: and your ears, for they hear.

17 For verily I say unto you, That many prophets and righteous men have desired to see those things which ye see, and have not seen them; and to hear those things which ye hear, and have not heard them.

18 Hear ye therefore the parable of the sower.

No subject that is addressed by Jesus receives more careful attention by way of parable explanation than the Kingdom of God. So with no apology and with eagerness to understand the mysteries of the Kingdom we turn our attention to the Kingdom parables. I suspect that it is our tendency to read too much into the parables. It is relatively easy to pick and choose phrases and define words in such a way that the parable ends up saying what we want it to say. I will not make any claim to be free of this tendency but do wish to find the general truth and meaning that is in the parable.

The Parable of the Wheat and the Tares- Matthew 13:24-30

Mt 13:24 ¶ Another parable put he forth unto them, saying, The kingdom of heaven is likened unto a man which sowed good seed in his field:

25 But while men slept, his enemy came and sowed tares among the wheat, and went his way.

26 But when the blade was sprung up, and brought forth fruit, then appeared the tares also.

27 So the servants of the householder came and said unto him, Sir, didst not thou sow good seed in thy field? from whence then hath it tares?

28 He said unto them, An enemy hath done this. The servants said unto him, Wilt thou then that we go and gather them up?

29 But he said, Nay; lest while ye gather up the tares, ye root up also the wheat with them.

30 Let both grow together until the harvest: and in the time of harvest I will say to the reapers, Gather ye together first the tares, and bind them in bundles to burn them: but gather the wheat into my bar

This rich parable opens with a man who sows **good seed in his** field. The sower is directly identified in Jesus' explanation of the parable (see Matthew 13:36-42) The sower is the "Son of man" or Jesus Christ Himself. This is fascinating for the Scriptures record that the Son of God was present at the creation itself and plays an integral role in the preservation and ongoing development of the cosmos (see Hebrews 1:1-4). Truly all these years of history, he has been the sower. And where has he been sowing? Answer: In his own field! In the giving of the parable, Jesus clearly indicates that the sower is sowing in his personal field (see verse 24). In his explanation of the parable, he identifies this field that he owns as the "world" (see verse 37). The "world" may be properly understood and translated as the "cosmos" or created order. Perhaps it is proper to understand the implications of this "seeding" to go far beyond the boundaries of planet earth...for you see the planting is in the cosmos. Please understand! I am not arguing for extra-terrestrial life. But I am arguing for the grandeur of God's plan for the human race that is truly cosmic in scope and stretches beyond our wildest imaginations. "Eye hath not seen nor ear heard..." I am also offering an explanation for the dignity of the human race in creation. It is people that the Lord has planted.

The implications of this parable are nothing short of incredible. Where did the good seed come from? And an equally important and difficult question- What is the origin of the tares? The parable seems to suggest a dualism when it identifies the good seed as the "children of the kingdom" and the tares as the "children of the wicked one." Orthodox Christianity has never accepted a dualism where there are two creators; one who has created the good and one who has created the bad such as is suggested in Zoroastrianism and among the Gnostics. The orthodox position is clearly correct. "The earth is the Lord's and the fullness thereof..." This includes the inhabitants of the earth. Satan has never had ex-nihilo creative power. He is a created being himself.

The Parable of the Mustard Seed- Matthew 13:31-32

Mt 13:31 Another parable put he forth unto them, saying, The kingdom of heaven is like to a grain of mustard seed, which a man took, and sowed in his field:

32 Which indeed is the least of all seeds: but when it is grown, it is the greatest among herbs, and becometh a tree, so that the birds of the air come and lodge in the branches thereof.

All great things have small beginnings. Seeds are an incredible microcosm of miracles. Contained in that tiny seed are the "blueprints" (genes) that in some mysterious way control and direct the pathway of a growing maturing plant. No matter where the mustard seed is planted, it grows up a mustard plant. True, no two plants are exactly

alike but there is no mistaking a mustard plant for another. A mustard plant is a mustard plant in spite of variations. Likewise the seeds of the Kingdom are planted throughout the earth; small seeds of truth, that are nevertheless capable of springing up from the earth to become a mighty plant that supports and nourishes the surrounding habitat. There is no mistaking it for another plant. The Kingdom is the Kingdom; nothing more and nothing less.

It is characteristic of people to fret and fuss over how the plant is growing. Perhaps this is unnecessary. I spent several years participating in a prison Bible Study ministry. I remember the great relief it was to me to discover that it was not my responsibility to manage each person's life and to make sure they "grew" into the person I thought they should be. Rather, my job was to sow the good seed of the Kingdom and then to stand back like the farmer and let it grow into the tree of the Lord. Yes, we are called to water, to nourish, and to care for, but never to manage all aspects of the growth. Perhaps we would save ourselves much grief and worry if we learned the parable of the mustard seed.

The Parable of the Leaven- Matthew 13:33

Mt 13:33 Another parable spake he unto them; The kingdom of heaven is like unto leaven, which a woman took, and hid in three measures of meal, till the whole was leavened.

Throughout Scripture leaven is typically cited as an example of the way evil will infect all that it touches with its deadly disease. Repeatedly, we are warned of its affects and told to cast out the leaven that destroys. But in this passage the Kingdom of heaven is given that same power; power to spread its influence outward to affect everything around it. This is a very positive view of the Kingdom. Again, faith beckons to us to engage in the work of the Kingdom knowing that such actions of faith will work like leaven. Again it is unnecessary for us to exhaustively understand the mechanisms by which this leaven influences the world around us. Perhaps one of the greatest expressions of faith is daily acts of goodness and justice couched in the confidence that such a life truly does positively influence our world in an eternal sense.

The Parable of the Hidden Treasure- Matthew 13:44

Mt 13:44 ¶ Again, the kingdom of heaven is like unto treasure hid in a field; the which when a man hath found, he hideth, and for joy thereof goeth and selleth all that he hath, and buyeth that field.

In this parable the Kingdom is compared to a treasure of priceless value. Needless to say, one of the big problems that persist in the Church is failure to recognize the true value of this treasure. Perhaps I am too critical here, but one cannot fail to see a correlation between the value system in Christian circles and the lack of Kingdom values. It is nothing short of astounding to see the number of times Jesus connects the impossibility of

experiencing the power of the Kingdom if one insists on valuing material wealth highly. Let the Scriptures speak:

Mt 19:24 And again I say unto you, It is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle, than for a rich man to enter into the kingdom of God.

Mr 10:23 And Jesus looked round about, and saith unto his disciples, How hardly shall they that have riches enter into the kingdom of God!

Mr 10:23 And Jesus looked round about, and saith unto his disciples, How hardly shall they that have riches enter into the kingdom of God!

Mr 10:24 And the disciples were astonished at his words. But Jesus answereth again, and saith unto them, Children, how hard is it for them that trust in riches to enter into the kingdom of God!

Mr 10:25 It is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle, than for a rich man to enter into the kingdom of God.

Lu 12:31 But rather seek ye the kingdom of God; and all these things shall be added unto you.

32 Fear not, little flock; for it is your Father's good pleasure to give you the kingdom.

33 Sell that ye have, and give alms; provide yourselves bags which wax not old, a treasure in the heavens that faileth not, where no thief approacheth, neither moth corrupteth.

34 For where your treasure is, there will your heart be also.

The call here is not to disengage from the affairs of this world and to flee to the wilderness. The call is to a value system that esteems the value of the Kingdom of God worth the abandonment of all else. No matter how we explain this truth we are forced to the realization that few Christians have “sold out” in pursuit of the Kingdom. Too often our value statements are mere words with little action that really affirms the loftiness or our words that claim focus on the things of the Lord. Herein I think is a fatal weakness that has kept the Church weak and anemic. Our values are really confused.

The call is not to abandon productivity or to sneer at the day of prosperity. The call is to so highly value the Kingdom of God that all of our productivity and prosperity is focused on the search for the hid treasure in Christ Jesus and its promotion throughout the earth. Consider the parable of the talents in this perspective.

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