

Summary of

# Kingdom Conspiracy

Returning to the Radical Mission of the Local Church

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## Chapter 1: Skinny Jeans kingdom

'Skinny Jeans' (SJ) is a cipher for younger Christian leaders who talk of 'kingdom work' as practical efforts to improve society, often in the public sector and via political processes. They see such work as having nothing to do with 'church'. But the Bible *never* uses 'kingdom' in this sense!

The SJ people would see Jane Addams as doing 'kingdom work'. She was an American winner of the Nobel Peace Prize (1931) for her efforts in bringing social justice to a deprived area of Chicago. She rejected the Christianity of her youth and replaced it with a 'social' variety shorn of repentance, personal salvation, the atoning work of Christ and the role of the church.

Her work was of great social value, but by biblical standards it could not properly be called 'kingdom work'.

## Chapter 2: Pleated Pants kingdom

'Pleated Pants' (PP) is a cipher for older and more conservative Christian scholars and leaders (George Eldon Ladd being typical) who see 'kingdom' as merely a synonym for preaching the gospel and seeing people get saved. It is 'the dynamic redemption of God in Christ'.

For them the kingdom has both present and future aspects. They see it as being glorious in its consummation but tend to be vague about what kingdom mission means in actual practice here and now. The nearest they get is to say that 'kingdom' is present when the gospel is preached, or when some act of power or deliverance takes place. It is seen in 'redemptive moments'.

They are also united in holding that kingdom means 'rule', but definitely not 'realm' (a territory and people ruled over). It is therefore nowhere and everywhere at the same time! The normal use of the term 'kingdom' in Scripture, however, clearly comprises both rule *and* realm; it usually means 'a people ruled by a king'.

The PP crowd, while not as activist as the SJ crowd, are generally in favour of influencing culture and society at large towards Christian values. The danger is that they name 'culture' what the Bible calls 'the world'—and that is something that needs radical confrontation, not quiet influence.

## Chapter 3: Tell me the kingdom story

A clear understanding of kingdom cannot be divorced from *Israel's story*.

The PP people ignore this completely because, for them, the answer to humanity's need is in Jesus, so they go straight to him. That is all the 'story' they see. All the OT background to his coming is treated as irrelevant. The SJ people's story, by contrast, is simply one of making the world a better place.

But, 'if Jesus was the answer, and the answer was that Jesus was the Messiah/King, what was the question?' That forces us back into the OT story. We must let the Bible frame our understanding.

There are in fact two stories in the kingdom story. They have generally been kept apart, but need bringing together. They are:

1. **C-F-R-C**. This stands for Creation, Fall, Redemption and Consummation. The PP crowd focus on this approach, and it remains at the heart of evangelicalism. Its appeal is that it resonates with people at a personal level: it points the way to *their* redemption. Its downside is that it gets the first two elements from the opening chapters

of Genesis, then leaps to the cross, ignoring almost the whole of the OT and thus making it redundant. It overlooks the fact that 'Christ [meaning 'Messiah'] died for our sins *according to the [OT] scriptures*' (1 Cor 15:3).

The gospel is the story of *Jesus*, and there can be no sure grasp of who he is without an appreciation of the background to his arrival. When he announced that 'the kingdom of God is at hand' his listeners knew 'the story so far' and understood his announcement in the light of it. We often do not. Tom Wright explains this well in his *The New Testament And The People Of God*.

2. **A-B-A<sup>1</sup>**. That is, A-B-'A Revised'. This is what really drives the kingdom story, and C-F-R-C is a theme within it. God's Plan A runs from Adam to Samuel. During that time God himself was the one and only King, ruling the world through his chosen people. It was a theocracy. Problems arose when his first representatives, Adam and Eve, sinned by wanting to be *god-like* rather than *god-ly*. They wanted the rule for themselves; they were usurpers. God forgave the usurpers and formed a covenant with Abraham.

Plan B is the rest of the OT story from Samuel onwards. It was in his day that God conceded that the Israelites could have a human king. King David became the key figure. His descendants, God declared, would rule on God's behalf forever. Their kingdom would thus be God's kingdom—the kingdom of God. During that period God forgave the people's sins through the Temple system of sacrifice. Theocracy had given way to monarchy. But the hope remained that one day God himself would rule again directly, and that hope was centred in the Davidic line.

When God's people came back to the land after the exile, they were still under foreign rule and felt themselves in a sense to be still in exile. Real deliverance from exile would come about only when Israel's sins were truly forgiven, and that would only be when God himself was once again King.

Plan A Revised came into operation when Plan A took on a new form *in the person of Jesus*. In him God now ruled again. It was the kingdom *of God* that Jesus said had come near. God was back in charge; the ideal Davidic king had now arrived. God's people lived under Jesus' rule and they received forgiveness through him, who would bring his rule to completion in the final kingdom.

We enter this story through conversion and progress in it through discipleship. Like Adam and Eve, we are usurpers, wanting to rule on our own account. But in conversion we surrender that desire and come under the kingship of Jesus. We become part of the kingdom. And a key element in our kingdom mission is to call on others to do the same. The PP folk usually get this right, but the SJ crowd tend to ignore it in the interests of social activism as an end in itself.

Discipleship means, among other things, getting a clear grasp of the A-B-A<sup>1</sup> story and actively living out our part in it. We can help our fellow-Christians do this by encouraging broad Bible reading and by preaching from the whole of Scripture, not just our favourite passages.

Meanwhile, we concede that the kingdom is here only in part; its fullness awaits Christ's return. Our expectations of what we can experience here and now will be governed by this understanding. Because kingdom now is incomplete we will extend forgiveness and kindness to those Christians, especially leaders, who fall short of the standards we would like them to live by and which will mark the ultimate kingdom expression.

## **Chapter 4: Kingdom mission is all about context**

'What makes a story come alive is its capacity to evoke perspective, memory and hope *for a specific people in a specific context*.'

Jesus did this by taking the Bible's A-B-A<sup>1</sup> plot and aiming it directly at Herod Antipas and the temple priests and Caesar in Rome. His message was countercultural and subversive of the powers of the age. We, too, must seek ways to apply the same story today in a way that fits and challenges our own context.

Biblical scholar James D.G. Dunn's work shows how the basic story was told in a variety of contexts. These were: return from exile; hope for prosperity, healing or paradise; a Messiah; the renewal of the covenant; building a new temple; the return of YHWH to Zion; triumph over, destruction of, and sometimes inclusion of gentiles; inheriting and expanding the land; a climactic period of tribulation; cosmic disturbances leading to a new creation; defeat of

Satan; final judgment; resurrection; Sheol/Hades morphing into a place of final retribution. These are all different angles on the same OT story and the expectations it produced.

Jesus himself announced the kingdom, and what it entailed, in the face of several competing interpretations, popular at the time, of what the kingdom would be. These were:

1. *The eschatological battle of God found in the Psalms of Solomon*  
This book was a Jewish response to Rome's capture of Jerusalem by Pompey in 63BC. God, it said, would raise up a military Messiah to smash the powers of Rome and expel all gentiles from the land. In this way the kingdom would be established.
2. *The Maccabean and Zealot strategy of holy warfare*  
The story of the bloody Maccabean Revolt against Syrian repression of Jewish culture, which took place in the mid-second century BC, is told in the apocryphal books of 1 & 2 Maccabees. The first-century AD exponents of this strategy were the Zealots, who used violence against Romans whenever possible. But Jesus explicitly rejected their approach to the kingdom.
3. *The Essene strategy of holy withdrawal*  
The Essenes (who produced the Dead Sea Scrolls) withdrew to the desert in Qumran. Seeing Jewish culture as too corrupt to change, they set up a 'pure' community away from it all. They quietly waited for God to express his wrath and so launch the kingdom. This was not the vision of Jesus.
4. *The Pharisee push for greater zeal for Torah observance*  
This was the most popular option in Jesus' day. The Pharisees wanted to bring Torah observance within the reach of all Jews so that their devotion would draw down the blessing of God and see the establishment of the kingdom. Jesus regularly clashed with them, teaching not love of Torah but a Torah of love, which they couldn't cope with. Furthermore, he saw himself as the centre of the story; they didn't.
5. *The Sadducee strategy of realism by cooperating with Rome*  
Their view of kingdom was to make the world a better place for themselves and others like them through negotiations with Rome. Jesus had little time for the Sadducees and their approach.

We too face competing stories in our generation. We can find help in how best to tell the true story by noting what, in Jesus' approach, the kingdom was *not*.

- *It was not a return to a former era*  
Jesus spoke into his current context, and we must speak into ours. There is no value in our returning to the first century and living like Jesus, Paul or Peter. Nor should we idolise more recent periods like the Reformation. Wayne Gordon, pastor of Lawndale Community Church (inner-city evangelism), and Tim Dickau, pastor of Grandview Calvary Baptist Church (in a fragmented, postmodern community), have shown how to apply the fundamentals of the kingdom story into living, current contexts.
- *It did not capitulate to current ruling stories*  
If we contextualise our mission too much we risk losing our distinctiveness. Jesus boldly challenged all the ruling stories of his generation, as outlined above.
- *It did not bow to the prevailing culture*  
Today, culture includes 'individualism, consumerism, nationalism, moral relativism, New Age, postmodern tribalism and salvation by therapy'. Also, the worldview of *power* remains dominant. Jesus countered the 'power of the sword' approach of Herod and Rome by the politics of sacrificial love, even though it meant dying at the hands of its proponents. In democratic societies the temptation is for us to use the power of the political process to force Christian values on society; that can't be right.

## Chapter 5: Kingdom is people

When Jesus announced, 'The kingdom has drawn near' it would have meant, to his listeners, 'Israel in the land' — *a people in a place, governed by a king*. The OT witness to this is consistent. But the PP people have 'de-landed', and thus largely de-peopled, the concept of kingdom altogether. They have reduced 'kingdom' to a vague notion of 'rule'.

King Jesus used several different 'people' metaphors for the citizens of his kingdom. They come in several groups:

- Those evoking *fellowship and community*  
Vineyard, branches and vines and wine, a 'nation', a fellowship at table, a 'people' and 'Israel'; they are also a flock, and they are 'one', friends, children of God, a brotherhood and a family.
- Those indicating his people as *separate or set apart*  
Because they are set apart they live by a different standard. See Matt 17:24-27, 'the children are exempt' but pay their taxes voluntarily. Jesus was different but used his freedom to enter the human condition. We too are different and use our freedom to enter our society's conditions for its redemption.
- Those showing them to be a *people with leaders*  
While Jesus remains King, he clearly appoints humans to rule under him. And their rule is acceptable only insofar as it reflects his rule.

But who is this 'people'. Is it the *church*? Many have kept kingdom and church quite separate, usually elevating the kingdom and decrying the church: 'Jesus preached the kingdom but unfortunately it was the church that showed up' (paraphrasing Alfred Loisy). Is this fair? Is it in fact right?

## Chapter 6: No kingdom outside the church

Both PP and SJ people keep 'kingdom' and 'church' apart. They can easily define 'church', but once they separate the two they find it hard to define 'kingdom'. Their definitions are notoriously vague, ending up as 'redemptive dynamic' or mere 'rule'. Some (like liberation theologian Gustavo Gutierrez) even insist that if the kingdom is to come into its own, the church must move out of the way.

More worryingly, while so many voices shout that kingdom and church are not the same, they fall into confusion when attempting to define the *relationship* between the two. Whatever that relationship is, it must be about *people*, since it is people who make up both the kingdom and the church.

Matt 16:16-19 describes Peter's confession of Jesus as Messiah, that is, as King. Jesus replies that on Peter, and/or his confession, he will build his *church*, against which its cosmic enemies will not prevail. Then he immediately adds that he will give him the keys of the *kingdom*. The church-kingdom link is unmistakable. The natural reading of this indicates that church and kingdom are in fact far closer to one another, to say the least, than many believe. Other scriptures reinforce this conclusion, using kingdom terminology when talking about the people who make up the church (e.g. Col 1:13; 4:11; Rev 1:6, 9).

Paul's teaching in Romans 11 indicates that God has been true to his covenant with Israel as the people of God. Far from abandoning Israel or replacing it with something else (the church), he has *expanded* it by bringing gentiles into it. The church, then, is the kingdom called Israel, now become Israel Expanded, the one people of God (Eph 3:2-6).

In the NT, 'church' is Greek *ekklēsia* (linked to Hebrew *qahal*, which referred to Israel's public gatherings). In the mind of the NT writers, therefore, 'church' referred to local gatherings of Israel Expanded in the Roman Empire. In Greek society *ekklēsia* referred to local political gatherings of citizens and leaders. So when Paul and the first Christians called themselves the church they were claiming that they were Israel Expanded and were gathered locally as a sociopolitical fellowship under King Jesus. Both 'kingdom' and 'church', then, are sociopolitical terms describing the people of God.

The life of the church was marked by *koinōnia* (fellowship). This emphasises that its members were gathered out of the world, and stood over against the world, in a separate joining-together or fellowship. They enjoyed a family kind of life that was in marked contrast to society at large.

What about the 'land' aspect of the kingdom promises? We are not to see them as in any way related to current Middle Eastern developments but rather as fulfilled in an expansion of 'the land' to embrace the Roman Empire and, subsequently, the whole earth. As for Torah as a key component of the kingdom vision, Jesus provided in the Sermon on the Mount a new Torah for kingdom citizens, expressed as life in the Spirit. So we have in the church the makings of a kingdom, with a king, a rule, a people, a land and a law.

Church and kingdom, furthermore, both have a 'now' and a 'not yet' aspect. Many have tended to compare the church *now*, beset as it is by many failings, with the kingdom *as it will one day be*. That is not fair. The church, too,

has a glorious 'not yet', as described in Eph 5:25-27 and pictured vividly in the closing chapters of Revelation. We must compare like with like. (By 'church', of course, is meant not denominations or buildings but the redeemed community.)

If church and kingdom, then, are effectively the same, kingdom mission is church mission. If we are to remain true to the NT, there is, in spite of what many are saying today, *no 'kingdom mission' that is not church mission.*

## **Chapter 7: Kingdom mission as church mission**

'Kingdom mission is about creating and sustaining that kingdom community, the church.' What does this mean in practice?

1. *Church is God's dwelling-place*

God's ultimate aim is to dwell with his people. He does that already by his Spirit, and kingdom mission is about *being* God's dwelling-place in the world. We are to mediate his presence to the society around us in our attitudes and actions as a kingdom community.

2. *The church is a kingdom fellowship, or a kingdom politic*

This does not mean supporting a particular political party or candidate but *being* a living demonstration of what it means to be governed by King Jesus. We represent a new social order, a new justice, a new peace, a new economics, a new way of life. What we want for our nation should first be embodied in the local church, and that is the only activism we need. Too much involvement in national politics inevitably waters down our Jesus-centredness and ends up with nothing better than the so-called Judeo-Christian ethic.

3. *Church is learning to live under the rule of King Jesus*

He is 'Lord'—of everything—and we are his subjects, living in obedience to him. We take our standards from him instead of parroting Western liberalism.

4. *Church functions through fellowship*

The most political thing we can do is *gather together* to do the things the church is called to do. We gather to hear God's word taught and preached, and to receive the sacraments, to exercise godly discipline, and to share the Spirit's fruit and gifts. We meet as an expression of the fact that we are *family*. We live as an alternative society.

5. *Church means learning to live in the world as free people*

As God's people we are free from the world's restraints—exempt from its taxation, for example. But we are also free to fit in with the world's expectations to a degree in order to commend the gospel, so we pay our taxes! This 'voluntary fitting-in' is the thinking behind the 'household regulations' in passages like Eph 5:21-6:9—geared to Greco-Roman society and not a pattern for all time.

6. *Church means an ordered life under local leaders*

Jesus is King, but he has appointed under-leaders, who will bring order to local church life. Insofar as they reflect the ways of Jesus himself we are to submit gladly to their leadership.

7. *Church mission means overflowing with good works into the public sector*

The love we experience within the church overflows to those outside. But we are to see what we do there as 'good works' for their own sake, and not as, in some non-church sense, 'kingdom mission'. 1 Peter has much to say on this. We are to be in society what Jeremiah urged the people of Judah to be in Babylon (Jer 29:4-9).

8. *This doing good means being missional in our vocation*

We are to be neighbourly towards everyone around us. And our vocation is to call them to live, like us, under King Jesus and become part of his church, his family, his kingdom. It is not primarily to influence culture, unless it is by our corporate example as a provocation to a better way of life.

9. *Church mission means using social justice activism, the social gospel and liberation theology as convenient vehicles for expressing love to those in need*

A true love for and submission to King Jesus will push us to use these and other means to express love to the needy folk around us. These are not ends in themselves, nor are they the gospel; they are just means to an

end, ways of expressing the gospel in practical ways. They are the overflow of the love we show first to our brothers and sisters in the local church (Gal 6:10).

Kingdom mission, then, is all about forming and enhancing local churches as expressions of the kingdom of God in this world.

## Chapter 8: The King of the kingdom

Jesus announced the kingdom of God. God became King again in Jesus, who is the King of the kingdom. Kings determine the character of their kingdom. What King Jesus is like—and thus what his kingdom is called to be like—is reflected in his titles:

- *Son of Man: Jesus' self-interpretation*  
Many wrongly think that this title refers to Jesus' humanity, over against 'Son of God', which speaks of his deity. With just one exception, it is Jesus himself who uses 'Son of Man'; it is his *self*-interpretation. Sometimes he uses it of himself as one who will suffer, but he uses it mainly in connection with his exalted status and his coming again, with Daniel 7 clearly in view. There, the Son of Man is honoured and made King of the kingdom that will supersede the kingdoms of men. We, as citizens of that kingdom, are called to be like him in suffering en route to exaltation.
- *Son of God: how others interpreted Jesus*  
The Roman emperor was called the Son of God, and that needs to be borne in mind when people gave the same title to Jesus. People did so, as his opponents, when they felt he was claiming too much for himself and, as his friends, when they wanted to specify him as Messiah, the King of Israel—for Israelite kings in the OT were viewed as 'son of God'. So to call Jesus that was to acknowledge him as King.
- *Messiah: the disciples' interpretation*  
Jesus' disciples called him Messiah on many occasions. It means 'anointed one', and the expectation of a new, anointed Davidic king had begun to flourish in the two or three centuries up to the time of Jesus. Anticipation of his arrival was in the air. But when Peter famously declared Jesus to be the Messiah, Jesus was quick to point out that this would mean his dying and rising again before he began to rule—which bewildered his followers. A cruciform King heads up a cruciform kingdom.

Kingdom mission begins and ends with this cruciform King Jesus. Each of the above titles, in different ways, tells the story of Jesus as the one who is sent by God to bring fulfilment to Israel's story by reclaiming the rule of God in this world. 'Mission' is not the first word: 'Jesus' is. He shapes mission; he doesn't just fit into our conception of it. Evangelism is not just proclaiming him as the Saviour of the individual. It is proclaiming him as King and calling people submit to him, or to start by answering the question, 'Who is Jesus?' There is no kingdom mission without this essential element.

This message offers hope for the future to a world surrendered to cultures of death. The kingdom now will one day be kingdom then. In delivering this message of hope we are to be incarnational, as Jesus was. For us, that means getting down alongside people in their need and sharing their pain. We die to self so that others can live.

## Chapter 9: Kingdom redemption unleashed

The 'utopia' of the consummated kingdom will only become a reality because of God's redemptive activity in Jesus, who is the Door to the kingdom now. 'No-one can see the kingdom of God unless they are born again' (John 3:3). The kingdom people, therefore, is a *redeemed*, liberated, saved people.

The redemptive aspects of the kingdom (freeing people from the enemy) become clear in passages like the following:

- *Matthew 12:28*  
Jesus exorcises a demonised man and the crowd wonder whether Jesus could be 'the son of David', which showed that they envisaged the Messiah, as son of David, as possessing curative powers. Matthew often quotes Isaiah, where such powers are mentioned, and when Jesus heals or exorcises he makes the connection to the kingdom through Isaiah's visions of the kingdom.

- *Matthew 11:2-6*  
John the Baptist in prison wonders whether Jesus is the promised one or not. Jesus tells his messengers to go back and quote him passages from Isaiah that confirm that he is indeed the promised one. He is curing the blind, the lame, the lepers and the deaf, plus raising the dead and proclaiming good news to the poor. Kingdom redemption is holistic.
- *Matthew 8:14-17*  
Jesus heals Peter's mother-in-law, and Matthew says this is to fulfil Isaiah's 'He took up our infirmities and bore our diseases' (53:4). Jesus, in the role of Isaiah's 'Suffering Servant', has entered into such solidarity with the suffering of others that he can reverse the suffering. Note that the language is substitutionary.
- *John 2:1-11; 10:10*  
The wedding at Cana. Jesus produced the equivalent of 907 bottles of wine! He demonstrated that he wished for people to have 'life to the full'. His abundant wine was the expression of his abundant life.

Kingdom redemption, then, deals with sin, finds its strength in the cross, has Jesus as the primary agent and sees God's new creation life unleashed. If these factors are missing, it is not kingdom redemption, even if it is liberating and for the common good.

Kingdom redemption is also cosmic and spiritual in that it deals with the powers of evil. The devil impacts people physically, morally and institutionally (the 'principalities and powers'). Jesus set people free at each of these levels.

So kingdom redemption is holistic, touching every aspect of human need. PP types focus on just one end of the spectrum: personal salvation from sin. At the other end, SJ types focus on improving society's ills in various ways. But *true kingdom mission* covers the full spectrum, with three main characteristics:

1. It admits the primacy of evangelism and also has a social dimension, but it sees the locus of the latter as being chiefly in the church as a witness to the world. The wide blessings enjoyed in the church spill over to the world outside.
2. It brings multi-dimensional wholeness to kingdom citizens. It sees them saved not only from sin but from the dominion of the evil one—and from systemic evil, represented in NT days by the powers of Rome.
3. It is, for the present, only partial redemption. That is why the church is often so messy and inept. The NT presents salvation in all three tenses.

## **Chapter 10: Kingdom is a moral fellowship**

What is the 'kingdom law' brought by Jesus to replace the Torah and to shape the lives of kingdom citizens?

First, those citizens have to enter the kingdom, and Jesus clearly conditions entry on morality in his seven 'entry' sayings recorded in the Gospels (Mat 5:20; 7:21; 18:3; 18:8-9; 19:17; 19:23-24; 23:13). The gist of these means that a would-be entrant must surrender to King Jesus and live under his rule.

What the moral fellowship of Jesus' followers looks like can be viewed under these headings:

1. *Cross*  
They are to take up their cross and follow him. They embrace suffering and death, and through them find resurrection. This is the very opposite of courting notions of power, as exemplified in Roman society.
2. *Righteousness*  
This is a key term in the Sermon on the Mount. It means living a life marked by good deeds so that outsiders, seeing, will be drawn to the King. Jesus gives a new 'kingdom Torah' in Mat 5:17-20, where he claims that the original Torah comes to completion in his own teachings. Its meaning is then expanded in v21-48. Almsgiving, prayer and fasting are lifted to a new level.
3. *Love*  
Mark 12:28-32 and John 13:34-35. Kingdom citizens love God and love others, including their enemies. Jesus himself is the model of the love they are to show. It is a rugged covenant commitment, being with people and for people.

Kingdom citizens are also to seek *peace*—ecclesial peace. They summon people out of the world into the church, where that peace can be found. That is why we must work hard at eliminating divisions and discord among Christians. There is value, of course, in seeking peace in the world through political means, but that is secondary. The same goes for other aspects of Jesus' kingdom ethic, but it is intended *for the church*; it can't be forced on others by political vote or legislation.

The kingdom's moral fellowship also touches *money and possessions*. That will mean a life of self-denial in sacrifice to others. Jesus did not have a theory of economics; he had a theory of love that found its way into economics. It challenges the 'What I earn is mine' assumption. Zacchaeus had the right idea.

## Chapter 11: Kingdom is hope

What is the 'not yet' of the kingdom going to be like? It will be:

1. *A flourishing fellowship or society*

Forget the 'float off to heaven' idea, which has little or no foundation. The kingdom's future is portrayed with 'Jerusalem' imagery. It is Jerusalem reshaped, reformed, revised, a fulfilled and happy society, with banqueting a key feature, 'because the essence of the kingdom is a celebratory fellowship with one another in peace and love and joy and abundance and safety.'

2. *Judgment*

Judgment is not primarily about who is in and who is out. In Israel's story it was about God stepping in to end what is wrong and to establish what is right in the world. Jesus himself will be the Judge. His predictions about the fall of Jerusalem are shadows of the ultimate judgment when *everything* will be sorted out. That judgment will involve punishment, which is portrayed as destruction. It will also bring rewards.

3. *Perfected community*

The idea of *utopia* is relevant to the kingdom. In the meantime what we might call *eu-topia* is the attempt to put u-topia into place in the here and now. Jesus, ruling on God's behalf, brings both to pass. The kingdom vision is one of magnificence and glory, a banquet of indescribable sumptuousness. All injustice will be eliminated, along with pain, tears, suffering and death. But it is vital to note that these are all in the context of a community, a society and not just the eternal life of the individual in the presence of God.

4. *Blessing*

That is, God's full approval, leading to total satisfaction, joy, fulfilment and contentment.

This clear vision of hope for what the 'not yet' aspect of the kingdom will mean influences kingdom mission today. Because it will mean the ultimate banquet, we focus on table fellowship here and now as a witness to the world. We don't eat just with the people we find of like mind, but with all who are God's people, regardless of their background, race, personality, education etc. We are to be intentionally inclusive. And we are to practise forgiveness and reconciliation in anticipation of the fullness of both in the coming kingdom.

Most fundamentally, we are to *be together*, as we shall be then. This will mean planning purely social gatherings of Christians as well as meetings for worship and teaching, sometimes in small groups, sometimes in larger ones. Together, we are to take pleasure in life's pleasurable things, because the experience of the kingdom will be a pleasurable one. 'Final blessedness forms an eternal and developing intimate, flourishing union with God and with others in the endless interaction of the kingdom of God.'

## Chapter 12: Kingdom theses

A summary of all the above in 15 propositions.

1. 'Kingdom' is primarily about *people*.
2. Kingdom is a complex of king, rule, people, land and law. So is church.
3. Like church, kingdom is both present and future.
4. Kingdom and church are effectively the same, just with slightly different emphases.
5. The 'Constantinian temptation' is to make the kingdom public by working with the state.
6. The 'social gospel' is another way of succumbing to the Constantinian temptation.



7. Jesus came to build the church/kingdom, not for 'the common good' or to improve 'the world'.
8. The King's character shapes the kingdom; his kingdom is cruciform.
9. Only the redeemed are kingdom citizens and able to do kingdom work.
10. We are to call people out of 'the world' or 'culture' into the kingdom.
11. Kingdom citizens have solid hope that the judgment of the King will put things right.
12. They are in a moral fellowship marked by righteousness and love.
13. The good works endemic in the kingdom/church spill over to affect the world outside.
14. Kingdom mission is local church mission.
15. The only place kingdom work can be done is in and through the local church.

## **Appendix 1: The Constantinian temptation**

This is 'the temptation to get the state to combine its powers with the church's powers to accomplish, institutionalise, and legalise what is perceived to be divine purposes.' The term refers to the Roman emperor Constantine, under whose reign church and state were first combined in the fourth century AD, with harmful long-term results.

The author provides a historical summary of different approaches to the problem of how God's people can best influence society at large through partnership with the state. He concludes that they can't and shouldn't try. They are to build the kingdom/church as an alternative society that will be a demonstration and provocation to 'the world' or 'culture' (which are the same thing).

## **Appendix 2: Kingdom today**

In this lengthy and detailed section the author examines different ways in which theologians have, in different periods of history, taught that 'kingdom' should be implemented. Briefly, these are:

- Christ *against* culture: the Anabaptist tradition.
- Christ *of* culture: natural law and cultural Protestantism.
- Christ *above* culture: Aquinas and the Roman Catholic Church.
- Christ and culture *in paradox*: Martin Luther and Reinhold Niebuhr.
- Christ *transforming* culture: Calvin, Edwards, Barth.

Each is assessed, its good and bad points highlighted.

David Matthew, 2014

