



THE LIFE OF CHRIST
THE MISSION & MESSAGE OF JESUS

MESSAGE

“For the Son of Man came to seek and to save the lost.” Luke 19:10

“For even the Son of Man came not to be served but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many.”
Mark 10:45

MESSAGE

Then Pilate said to him, “So you are a king?” Jesus answered, “You say that I am a king. For this purpose I was born and for this purpose I have come into the world—to bear witness to the truth. Everyone who is of the truth listens to my voice.” – John 18:37

MESSAGE

“Repent, for the kingdom of heaven has
come near.”

Matt 4:17

KINGDOM OF HEAVEN

1. The range of God's effective will.

- Immaterial (Ps 51:17; Hos 6:6; Amos 5:20-24; Mic 6:6-8)

- Material (Ps 24:1, 96)

2. Already here (Matt 4:17).

3. Not yet completed (Rom 8:20-23; 1 Cor 15:20-28; Rev 21:5).

METANARRATIVE

1. Creation
2. Fall
3. Redemption
4. Restoration

SERMON ON THE MOUNT

1. “You have heard that it was said . . . but I tell you . . .” (Six times in Matt 5).
2. Law vs. Oral Tradition
3. The central issue is the *condition of the heart*. Not simply *what* but *why*.

SERMON ON THE MOUNT

The worst tragedy would be to turn the Sermon on the Mount into another form of legalism; it should rather put an end to all legalism... the Sermon on the Mount proves that before God we all stand on level ground... Having fallen from the absolute Ideal, we have nowhere to land but in the safety net of absolute grace.

– Philip Yancey

WHAT IS THE HEART?

“[The] will or spirit is . . . the heart in the human system: the core of its being.”

Dallas Willard, *Renovation of the Heart*

WHAT IS THE HEART?

“Life must be organized by the will if it is to be organized at all. It can only be pulled together ‘from the inside.’ That is the function of the will or heart: to organize our life as a whole, and, indeed, to organize it around God . . .

WHAT IS THE HEART?

“A great part of the disaster of contemporary life lies in the fact that it is organized around feelings. People nearly always act on their feelings, and think it only right. The will is then left at the mercy of circumstances that evoke feelings.”

Dallas Willard, *Renovation of the Heart*

SERMON ON THE MOUNT

The message of the kingdom is the transformation of the heart resulting in a change of life to be the right type of person, expanding the realm of God's effective rule on the earth (Matt 6:9-10).

KINGDOM REQUIREMENTS

Two kingdom parables:

- Matt 13:44
- Matt 13:45-46

Both parables share a common *cost*, both contain the acquisition of great *value*.

JESUS ON COST AND VALUE

Cost (Matt 16:24; Mk 8:34; Lk 9:23)

1. Deny yourself
2. Take up your cross
3. Follow

JESUS ON COST AND VALUE

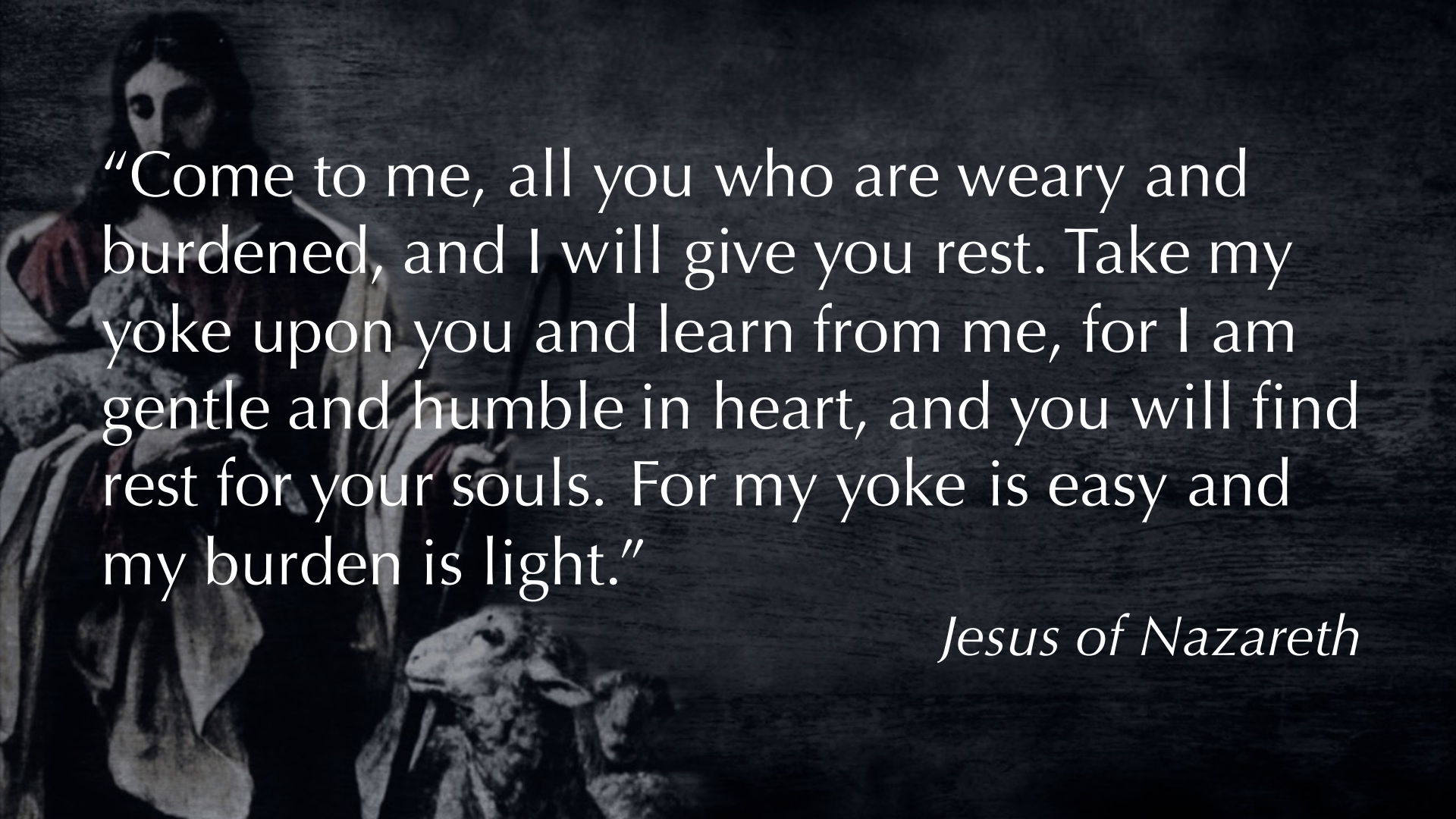
Value (Matt 16:25-26; Mk 8:35-37; Lk 9:24-25)

1. Gain your life.
2. Preserve your soul.
3. Place a high value on your soul.

KINGDOM REQUIREMENTS

“I think what Jesus is saying is, ‘If you are going to follow me, life on your terms is over.’”

Dr. Steve Porter

A dark, monochromatic painting of Jesus Christ. He is depicted from the chest up, wearing a dark robe with a red sash. He has long, dark hair and a beard. He is looking slightly to the left. In the foreground, a sheep is visible, looking towards the left. The background is dark and textured.

“Come to me, all you who are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you and learn from me, for I am gentle and humble in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. For my yoke is easy and my burden is light.”

Jesus of Nazareth



NEXT WEEK:

BETRAYAL, TRIAL, EXECUTION

THE MISSION OF GOD

The Great Questions team at Watermark Community Church consists of men and women who are passionate about providing clarity for people whose questions are keeping them from responding in faith to Jesus. One of the tools often used in answering skeptics and seekers is the theological target, a target that employs concentric circles to delineate various theological issues based on importance, the essentials being the bulls-eye, the extremely important but not essentials in the second circle and so forth down to the issues no one really cares about but are fun to talk about. This tool helps because it prioritizes questions and helps people see that more often than not their question, while extremely important to them, is not essential to Christian belief. It also helps steer the conversation to the essentials, and the central tenet of the essentials: the resurrection. I believe it is the same with a question about the mission of God; unless we begin with and allow the resurrection to inform our belief I believe we are starting from the wrong spot and are missing something fundamental. After all, Paul did say something about faith being useless if Jesus is not alive.¹

If the resurrection is the central act in the mission of God, then what is the broader story it fits into? Christianity asserts that God created the universe and everything in it, both material and immaterial. This includes angels, other possible worlds, stars, planets, the earth, and then out of the earth, you and me, who were given the responsibility to fill the earth, subdue it and rule over it as his representatives.² Over this whole creation, God rules. Broadly speaking, this rule is known as the *kingdom of God*, or what Dallas Willard calls the “range of his effective will, where what he wants done is done.”³ More narrowly the kingdom of God is a reality that broke through into creation with the advent of Jesus.⁴ I will argue in this essay that the kingdom of God is both broad in the sense that it includes God sovereignly ruling over all creation (both material and immaterial)⁵ and narrow in the sense that Jesus’ life and ministry was something totally unique, bringing into reality something that had been promised for millennia.

Though God’s rule extends over everything in his creation, certain angelic beings in his creation rebelled against him and became traitors to his rule. The chief of these beings then exerted his substantial power and convinced the first humans to rebel against God and become traitors as well. The

¹ 1 Cor 15:14, 17.

² Gen 1:28. This is the first commission. The Great Commission passages in the Gospels are viewed by some, especially those who specialize in theology of place, as God’s commission to restore our original command to rule over the earth. The view asserts that by making disciples of all nations God is using us to redeem his placemakers so they can once again fulfill this first commission.

³ Based on this broad definition Willard goes on to argue that Jesus’ life on earth did not bring the kingdom into existence because it already existed; however, he did make it available in a whole new way (Dallas Willard, *The Divine Conspiracy: Rediscovering Our Hidden Life in God* [San Francisco: HarperCollins, 1998], 25-27).

⁴ N. T. Wright points out that the phrase “kingdom of God” was not frequently used prior to Jesus, and when placed in its historical context actually emphasizes God’s right to rule and order things rightly under his reign, which would obviously exclude Caesar, the Herods, etc., and include Torah, the Temple and the land (N. T. Wright, *The New Testament and the People of God* [Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1992], 302-03; N. T. Wright, *Jesus and the Victory of God* [Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1996] 467-69).

⁵ Ps 96.

angelic rebellion and the subsequent human rebellion resulted in fundamentally disordered existence in every dimension (both immaterially and materially).⁶ Because life originates in, flows out of and is sustained by God, the natural outworking of creation that exists apart from his rule is entropy, chaos, dysfunction and death. This evil is the condition God works to redeem, from his promise to Adam in the garden to Abraham down through the nation of Israel then finally in the person of Jesus.⁷

It is important to understand the broad metanarrative then the context of Jesus' life more specifically, because Jesus saw himself as the central actor in the entire human story, the embodiment, the entelechy of the kingdom of God on the mission of God that played out in and around Jerusalem in the first Century.⁸ He is the King. He is the King on a mission. But what is his mission? In short, it is redemption. At his death Jesus absorbed all the rebellion and brokenness brought about by our treason. In order to die he had to, for here was a man "so full of life that when he wished to die he had to 'borrow death from others.'"⁹ In some incomprehensible sense, Jesus looked past the religious leaders who condemned him and the Romans who crucified him to the Enemy, the immaterial power who held a death grip on his creation.¹⁰ In absorbing our death not only was this grip released but our treason was replaced with God's righteousness, enabling us once again to be and function as full citizens in the kingdom of God, and to fulfill the purpose we were created for.¹¹ The validating mark of this victory over the Enemy is Jesus' resurrection from the dead.¹² That is why the resurrection is so central to the story, it communicates redemption, reversal, new life, and serves as a glimpse not of some otherworldly, ethereal existence but the concrete physical reality we were created for.¹³

So if Jesus' mission is essentially redemption as is shown through the resurrection, how exactly is this redemption working itself out and who, or what is being redeemed? The *how* can be broken into two interrelated but distinct categories: already and not yet. These categories arise directly from Jesus' life, death and resurrection. Jesus obviously believed that in some sense he was, as the fulfillment of the Law and Prophets foretold in the Scriptures, bringing about the kingdom of God in an entirely new way.¹⁴ Yet he also said he would come again as the Judge both to gather his own and

⁶ Gen 3; Jer 4:22-28; Hos 4:1-3; Rom 1:18-32, 3:9-20.

⁷ Gen 3:15, 15:4-7; Ex 19:3-6; Col 1:15-20.

⁸ Matt 4:17.

⁹ C. S. Lewis, *God in the Dock: Essays on Theology and Ethics* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1970), 206.

¹⁰ N. T. Wright states this well: "Jesus was welcoming sinners, keeping company with the unclean; their taint was to infect him at last. He took a stand which brought him into inevitable conflict with the authorities, but he construed that conflict as being not merely with them but with the dark power that, he believed, stood behind them. The climax of the story, of the battle for the kingdom, was therefore, inescapably, that Jesus would die . . . but this death, as he conceived it, would be the actual victory of the kingdom, by which the enemy of the people would finally be defeated" (Wright, *Jesus and the Victory of God*, 466).

¹¹ 2 Cor 5:21.

¹² Rom 1:4.

¹³ Lewis is helpful when thinking about Jesus' miracles as signs, the greatest of which is the resurrection: "These Signs do not take us away from reality; they recall us to it – recall us from our dream world of 'ifs and ands' to the stunning actuality of everything that is real. They are focal points at which more reality becomes visible than we ordinarily see at once" (Lewis, *God in the Dock*, 36).

¹⁴ Matt 4:17, 5:17; Lk 17:21; Jn 5:39, 46.

execute righteous judgment on the traitors to his kingdom.¹⁵ In this sense redemption has occurred, is occurring and will finally and ultimately occur.

The *who*, or *what* of redemption is also best thought of in two interrelated but distinct categories: the immaterial and material. We will examine them in that order. First (in order and function), the immaterial. The immaterial is the will, the spiritual, emotional, moral, creative, relational, even mental part of the self. My physical brain is functioning properly (at least I hope it is), but the ideas and thoughts that work themselves out through my brain are not my brain . . . they are immaterial. Such is the origin of this essay. In the same way the choices we make originate in our immaterial will but they naturally work themselves out in the material world. It was from this immaterial will that mankind exercised its ability to choose and rebelled against the rule of God. This rebellion resulted in disordered desire, so while we retained our natural ability to choose, our desires became enslaved to sin.¹⁶ The act of atonement and resurrection redeemed us from power and penalty of sin and reconciled us back to the Father as sons of the kingdom, so in keeping with resurrection, we were dead in our sins but have been raised with Christ to a new life.¹⁷ This redemption began to fundamentally reorder our desires back toward God through the work of the Spirit.¹⁸

Subsequent to immaterial redemption is material redemption. Just as our immaterial rebellion distorted the way we interact with our bodies and the rest of creation, so our immaterial redemption redeems the way we interact with our bodies and the rest of creation. God created us out of the material world and as such we are material beings. To do anything at all (including thinking or praying or experiencing anything whatever) requires a physical body. Indeed, for redemption to take place at all God himself became a man, died a physical death and was physically raised from the dead, the first of many to come, reconciling all things, both immaterial and material, to himself through his sacrifice.¹⁹ Jesus did not redeem us “out of creation, but as part of the redeemed creation itself – a creation that will again be fully and eternally for God’s glory.”²⁰ Jesus showed by his physical resurrection that he is the King whose kingdom spans both the immaterial and the material.

Unfortunately there have been shifts away from a more comprehensive view of the kingdom of God to an unbalanced and therefore unhealthy emphasis on one aspect of the kingdom at the expense of the other. The first shift occurred as secularism rose in the modern era. Instead of engaging secularism with the gospel, evangelicals tended to retreat and draw battle lines that directly fed the culture war so pervasive today. This entrenchment resulted in something Darrow Miller calls *evangelical gnosticism*, the belief held by many in the Christian church that spiritual activity is good and material activity is at best

¹⁵ Matt 25:31-46; Mk 14:62; Jn 14:3. This tension between the kingdom of God already present and not yet fully realized is commonly known as *inaugurated eschatology*.

¹⁶ Jn 8:34.

¹⁷ Eph 2:1-7.

¹⁸ Dallas Willard, “Spiritual Formation and the Warfare between the Flesh and the Human Spirit,” *Journal of Spiritual Formation & Soul Care* 1, No. 1 [2008]: 79-87.

¹⁹ Col 1:15-23.

²⁰ Christopher J. H. Wright, *The Mission of God’s People: A Biblical Theology of the Church’s Mission* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2010), 56.

neutral and at worst, bad.²¹ While the effects of this belief have been many, perhaps the most significant is the tendency to view the kingdom as immaterial redemption only, at the expense of the material aspects of the kingdom.²²

The second shift is more recent and is marked by a movement away from the foundation of the immaterial toward a focus on social justice. Scot McKnight describes this movement as “good deeds done by good people (Christian or not) in the public sector for the common good.”²³ This general activity may be done with the best of intentions but if material activity does not flow out of immaterial redemption through Jesus then while it may help give people a measure of comfort it is ultimately not redemptive. Just as evangelical gnosticism is insufficient because it lacks material redemption, a social activism divorced from the foundation of an immaterial redemptive relationship with Jesus is also insufficient. Over and against these shifts away from a comprehensive view of the kingdom of God, the biblical view presents a deeply integrated, holistic, symbiotic relationship between the immaterial and the material aspects of God’s creation.

Central to the gospel is the fact that God defeated the Enemy and sin and death and has made a way for repentance, for traitors to return to their King. But God did not wage war against the Enemy in the spiritual realm only, he became a man, a man who physically engaged sin, death and the chaos of creation and *physically reversed their effects*.²⁴ We understand the kingdom because Jesus was the perfect embodiment of it, so the story of Jesus is also the story of the kingdom. In this sense the resurrection is the central reality of the kingdom, the visible, historical, physical reality that is continually working out redemption in Enemy occupied territory, like a good infection. During the tension between *already* and *not yet* the kingdom is veiled but it is breaking through like rays of sunlight on a cloudy day.²⁵ We may live in dark days, but Jesus’ darkest days preceded the dawn of new life. It is the same with the

²¹ Darrow L. Miller with Stan Guthrie, *Discipling Nations: The Power of Truth to Transform Cultures* (Seattle: YWAM Publishing, 1998), 42-45. Chris Wright summarizes this well: “The result of such dichotomized thinking is an equally dichotomized Christian life . . . Many of us invest most of the available time that matters (our working lives) in a place and a task that we have been led to believe does *not* really matter to God – the so-called secular world of work – while struggling to find opportunities to give some leftover time to the only thing we are told *does* matter to God – evangelism” (Wright, *The Mission of God’s People*, 223). For proponents of sacred space this dualism totally ignores the original commission to mankind, to fill the earth, subdue it and rule over it as God’s representatives.

²² This is the mistake DeYoung and Gilbert make. For them the kingdom refers to an immaterial dynamic relationship only as seen by statements like: “The kingdom isn’t geographical. Rather, it is defined relationally and dynamically; it exists where knees and hearts bow to the King and submit to him.” To this I say yes, and no. The kingdom is a dynamic immaterial relationship *first*, but it absolutely works itself out in the real, material world. It has to. As previously mentioned, to do anything at all requires a physical body, so if the immaterial redemption does not work itself out in physical space then it is not real. There is such a deep interconnectedness between the two that any approach that either minimizes or dismisses this connection altogether will ultimately prove insufficient (Kevin DeYoung and Greg Gilbert, *What Is the Mission of the Church?: Making Sense of Social Justice, Shalom, and the Great Commission* [Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2011], 119-22).

²³ Scot McKnight, *Kingdom Conspiracy: Returning to the Radical Mission of the Local Church* (Grand Rapids: Brazos Press, 2014), 4.

²⁴ N. T. Wright speaks of the resurrection transferring the early Christians’ kingdom understanding from an insufficient expectation to a new and fuller meaning: “It would be easy at this point to suppose that this transferred sense was a ‘spiritualization’, a translation into the categories of private illumination or ‘religious experience’, but that is precisely what did *not* happen . . . The transferred sense remained a public, this-worldly sense, a sense of the creator god doing something new within creation, not of a god acting to rescue people *from* creation. And the public, this worldly sense in question included both the common life of the Christian community and, particularly, their claim that Jesus was lord, carrying as it did the meaning, *not* simply that Jesus was ‘*their* lord’ in a private or strictly personal sense, but that Jesus was already the true sovereign of the world” (N. T. Wright, *The Resurrection of the Son of God* [Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2003], 567).

²⁵ DeYoung and Gilbert, *What Is the Mission of the Church?*, 134.

kingdom. Just as new life does not come without the intense pain of childbirth, so all of creation (both material and immaterial) groans in eager expectation for Christ to subject all enemies and present the kingdom to his Father, making all things new.²⁶ C. S. Lewis puts it well:

What we have been told is how we men can be drawn into Christ – can become part of that wonderful present which the young Prince of the universe wants to offer to His Father – that present which is Himself and therefore us in Him. It is the only thing we were made for. And there are strange, exciting hints in the Bible that when we are drawn in, a great many other things in Nature will begin to come right. The bad dream will be over: it will be morning.²⁷

In light of this narrative we can say that the mission of God is both to redeem his creation (immaterial and material) and eradicate all evil, that he may be all in all.²⁸ As his redeemed people, the church's mission is to cooperate with God in his mission. This means the mission is not ours, it is his and it is his to accomplish. Too often we mistake God's mission for our own, then carry around an unbearable weight everywhere we go, urgently pushing ourselves and others into what DeYoung and Gilbert call "oughts" instead of encouraging people to pay close attention to the unique situation God has placed them in and ask "what would God have me do to cooperate with what he is already doing?"²⁹

All of life should be understood in terms of holistic redemption, which is typified and historicized in the resurrection of Jesus. I believe if we are talking about kingdom or mission apart from this foundation we are crippling ourselves from the outset. Theology of mission stems from kingdom theology, so it is imperative that we think rightly about the metanarrative that drives so much of how we think and what we do.

God is the King. Everything in all of creation is his.³⁰ He is redeeming his people to act as his under-rulers and execute his will by faithfully and accurately representing him in all of life (both immaterially and materially). It is our responsibility to challenge whatever opposition exists that thinks it has the right that is God's alone. No doubt this opposition is real and powerful and in many places sits in the dominant position (for now). But God is using every part of us to break through this opposition in love and serve notice that Jesus is the King, the King who will ultimately set things right. N. T. Wright summarizes well: "The church that is renewed by the message of Jesus' resurrection must be the church that goes to work precisely in that space, time, and matter and claim it in advance as the place of God's kingdom, of Jesus' lordship, of the power of the Spirit."³¹

²⁶ Rom 8:20-23; 1 Cor 15:20-28; Rev 21:5.

²⁷ C. S. Lewis, *Mere Christianity* (San Francisco: HarperCollins, 1980), 200.

²⁸ 1 Cor 15:28.

²⁹ DeYoung and Gilbert, *What Is the Mission of the Church?*, 21-22.

³⁰ Ps 24:1.

³¹ N. T. Wright, *Surprised by Hope: Rethinking Heaven, the Resurrection, and the Mission of the Church* (New York: HarperCollins, 2008), 265.