

HARDIN \* SIMMONS UNIVERSITY  
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“THE GOOD NEWS OF THE KINGDOM . . .” (LUKE 16:16 NLT)  
A THEOLOGICAL PERSPECTIVE ON SALVATION

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## Introduction

Christianity is ultimately about good news. The New Living Translation of the Bible uses the term *good news* 148 times; 127 times in the New Testament alone.<sup>1</sup> Although the term *good news* can refer to several different things in the Bible,<sup>2</sup> the majority of references involve God's good news of salvation for the world. Mark's Gospel opens with the good news about Jesus (1:1) who goes about announcing the good news to Israel (1:14, 15). Jesus states that the good news must be preached to all nations (13:10), and upon his death and resurrection, Jesus instructs his disciples to "go into all the world and preach the Good News to everyone" (16:15, NLT). The Christian church exists to share the 'good news' with the whole world, but what exactly is this 'good news' that Jesus instructs his followers to share?

The modern western evangelical church has prided itself for being gospel-oriented—that is, driven to share the good news with others. Yet the gospel that most modern western evangelical churches have largely shared over the last few centuries has left much to be desired. This gospel has generally emphasized the idea that people are inherently bad and have broken God's moral laws. They deserve punishment, death, and hell, but God sent His Son Jesus to die for humanity—taking their sin and punishment upon his own self—so they could be forgiven, made right with God, escape this evil world, and enter a perfect Heaven forever when they die.<sup>3</sup> To be sure, there is much truth to be considered in this gospel, and there is much more that evangelical churches have taught in addition to this gospel. Yet for the most part, this gospel has fallen far short of the revolutionary news that Jesus came to announce in the first century CE.

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<sup>1</sup> *Good News* usage in the NLT referenced using Bible Gateway software: [www.biblegateway.com](http://www.biblegateway.com).

<sup>2</sup> The term *good news* is first referenced in the NLT when King Saul is captured, killed, and beheaded by the Philistines, who go about proclaiming the good news of his death (1 Sam. 31:9)! Not all "good news" references in the Bible mean the same thing! Yet a significant number of these verses refer to God's good news of salvation.

<sup>3</sup> This summary of the gospel is not simply a generalization. This author could cite a host of evangelical churches, websites, books, and sermons that proudly espouse such a view.

For much of the twentieth century, the western church has largely been divided between conservative Christians—those who focus on individualism, personal salvation, one-time conversion, and heavenly eternity—and liberal Christians—those who focus on community, social reformation, spiritual change, and earthly mission. The good news seems to lie somewhere in between, yet something is needed to bring these various aspects of salvation together into one unifying picture. If the modern evangelical church truly wants to bring God’s good news to the world, then it will have to rediscover a salvation that truly saves, good news that really is good news for the world. The church will have to recover the larger picture of God’s salvation in the Scriptures—one that accounts for God’s good creation and intention to redeem it from evil, one that accounts for God’s foundational covenant with Israel, Jesus’ life, teachings, death, and resurrection, the necessity of the Holy Spirit, and the importance of the church. Hopefully this good news can bring together individual and community salvation, conversion and life-long transformation, future eternity and present mission. This author will attempt to recover that unifying picture of salvation found in the Scriptures and the early church, discover why it has largely been lost or forgotten throughout church history, as well as showing how the modern western church can adapt to both incorporate and implement it in the twenty-first century.

### **Searching for the Missing Link**

Many evangelical churches have formulated their understanding of the gospel by focusing on a few select verses of scripture found in Paul’s letter to the Romans—often referred to as the ‘Roman Road.’ This set of four or five verses—3:23, 5:8, 6:23, 10:9-10, 10:13—is usually considered to be the central foundation of the gospel, with everything else concerning salvation in the New Testament believed to be written around it. The problem is that the Roman

Road is only one piece of the larger salvation picture. It gives people the impression that salvation is merely an individual sin-forgiveness transaction with God by trusting in Jesus for eternal life—which is usually translated as “heaven when you die.” Everything else—community with God’s people, spiritual growth and transformation, continuing with Jesus’ mission, and the larger restoration all of creation—is seen as an afterthought, or at the very least, as fine print at the bottom of a dubious salvation contract. In his book, *Kingdom Come*, Allen Wakabayashi writes concerning the Roman Road problem: “I found that as I read the New Testament, whenever the writers talked about the gospel I simply read into that word what I *already knew* to be the gospel. Rather than letting Jesus and the New Testament writers tell me what the gospel was, I let my preconceived notions of the gospel dictate its meaning.”<sup>4</sup> Some Protestant scholars, however, suggest that we are looking for the central theme of salvation in the wrong place. In his book, *The Secret Message of Jesus*, Brian McLaren writes,

I was having lunch one day with a well-known scholar and writer . . . when he said, “You know, most evangelicals haven’t the foggiest notion of what the gospel really is.” . . . I answered by quoting the apostle Paul in the New Testament—statements about justification by grace through faith, the free gift of salvation, Christ being a substitution sacrifice for my sin. “That’s exactly what most evangelicals say,” he replied . . . I was preparing myself for heresy, not for enlightenment, since I was quite confident in my quotations from Paul. [He replied] “*The Kingdom of God is at hand*. That was Jesus’ message. Don’t you think we should let Jesus tell us what the gospel is?”<sup>5</sup>

According to McLaren’s startling realization, the Kingdom of God is the missing link to salvation.<sup>6</sup> He began a journey, going through the entire New Testament with fresh eyes—starting with the gospels—to see if he could find a larger pattern and purpose in Jesus’ Message. Other Christian writers and scholars have begun to question the status quo and do the same.

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<sup>4</sup> Allen Mitsuo Wakabayashi, *Kingdom Come* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2003), 22.

<sup>5</sup> Brian McLaren, *The Secret Message of Jesus* (Nashville: W Publishing Group, 2006), 90-91.

<sup>6</sup> McLaren credits N. T. Wright, Walter Brueggemann, and Dallas Willard, among others, with helping him to see this kingdom concept. George Eldon Ladd’s *The Gospel of the Kingdom* (1959) is foundational on the subject.

Wakabayashi writes, “According to Matthew, Mark, and Luke, the kingdom of God was at the heart of Jesus and his ministry. In fact, Jesus himself tells us to seek *first* the kingdom of God. I firmly believe that if we were to ask what the gospel was that Jesus preached, it would have something to do with the kingdom of God.”<sup>7</sup> Jesus began his public ministry by saying: “The kingdom of God has come near. Repent and believe the good news!” (Mark 1:15, TNIV). He told numerous parables about the kingdom, instructing his disciples to go out and “proclaim the kingdom of God” (Luke 9:2, TNIV). He promised that the “gospel of the kingdom will be proclaimed throughout the whole world” (Matt. 24:14, ESV). After his death and resurrection, Jesus appeared “over a period of forty days and spoke about the kingdom of God” (Acts 1:3, TNIV). Philip “proclaimed the good news of the kingdom of God and the name of Jesus Christ” (Acts 8:12, TNIV). In Corinth, Paul spent three months “arguing persuasively about the kingdom of God” (Acts 19:8, TNIV). Finally, Acts ends with Paul “boldly proclaiming the Kingdom of God and teaching about the Lord Jesus Christ” (Acts 28:31, NLT).

The Kingdom of God provides the framework in which we can finally make sense of this larger salvation picture. God’s kingdom—which is based upon the Greek word *basileia*—represents the realm or society in which God’s heavenly will is done and his reign experienced.<sup>8</sup> In this context, salvation is no longer about escaping this evil world after death; rather, it is about God’s kingdom reign breaking into our world; eventually restoring creation to the way it was always meant to be. Salvation is no longer imagined as an isolated relationship with God in a disembodied heaven; rather, it is an invitation to live with God and his people in God’s kingdom community. Salvation is no longer just about forgiveness and anticipating eternal life in the future; it is also about transformation and participation in God’s kingdom expansion now.

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<sup>7</sup> Wakabayashi, 27.

<sup>8</sup> Ibid., 30.

### Lost in Translation

If the good news of salvation primarily involves new life with Jesus in God's kingdom, then why has the historical church—for the most part—largely ignored or forgotten this central aspect of Jesus' teaching? The answer lies primarily in church history. In his book, *The Story of Christianity*, Justo Gonzalez writes about Emperor Constantine's rise to power in early fourth century CE Rome. Practically overnight, Christianity transformed from being a persecuted, underground, peaceful resistance movement rallying against the Roman Empire to becoming the official, organized, military-backed, state-religion of the largest empire in the world.<sup>9</sup>

Eusebius—author of *Church History* and the first major church historian of the Roman Empire—considered Constantine's rise to power and Christendom's official formation as the culmination of history in which God's kingdom had finally and fully begun to arrive on earth.<sup>10</sup> Anticipating and participating in the coming of God's kingdom over and against the Roman Empire was no longer emphasized; rather, the new focus of Christianity and the church became to individually and collectively convert people inside the Roman Empire into the church and outside the Roman Empire into the Christian nation-state. Salvation became more about one's individual entry, conversion, nationality, right orthodoxy (belief), and preparation for the afterlife. Gonzalez writes, "One receives the impression that now, with Constantine and his successors, the plan of God has been fulfilled. Beyond the present political order, all that Christians are to hope for is their own personal transference into the heavenly kingdom."<sup>11</sup> In this crucial moment in history, the revolutionary message of Jesus and the Kingdom was exchanged for that of Constantine and Christendom.

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<sup>9</sup> Justo Gonzalez, *The Story of Christianity* (New York: HarperSanFrancisco, 1999), 124.

<sup>10</sup> *Ibid.*, 132.

<sup>11</sup> *Ibid.*, 134.

In his book, *The Secret Message of Jesus*, McLaren paints a broader picture of why the church lost or forgot Jesus' message of the kingdom over the centuries—only to begin to rediscover it at the end of the Twentieth century. First, McLaren points to the second century CE, when Christianity transitioned from being a largely Jewish sect to “a Gentile religion with persistent anti-Semitic tendencies.”<sup>12</sup> The church largely became ignorant or blind to the radical Jewish-prophetic dimensions of Jesus' kingdom message, as well as an understanding of the first century culture that Jesus, Paul, and the early church taught and lived in. Second, the church's divorce from its early Jewish roots was replaced by “a corresponding love affair with Greek philosophy,” one that tended to spiritualize much of Jesus' kingdom message into timeless truths and abstract concepts.<sup>13</sup> The church got involved in heavy theological discussions, preserving its doctrinal integrity (orthodoxy), at the expense of its ethical integrity (orthopraxy).

Third, as Gonzalez already pointed out—and McLaren so poignantly states—in the fourth century CE, “Christianity now entered a lasting marriage with Constantine's Empire.”<sup>14</sup> At that point it became very difficult, if not impossible, for the Official Roman Church to question the status-quo. They had become the very thing that Jesus and the early church had preached against. Fourth, this allied Roman church and empire constantly did battle with neighboring tribes and nations throughout the early and middle ages—with the Huns, Goths, Vikings, as well as several crusades against the Muslims—and was in no position to re-evaluate its message in times of war. Such an attempt would have no doubt “been equated with treason.”<sup>15</sup> Fifth, the sixteenth century CE Protestant Reformation brought vast change and theological reflection, but for the most part, succeeded only in creating new alliances away from Rome with neighboring secular states.

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<sup>12</sup> McLaren, 211.

<sup>13</sup> Ibid., 212.

<sup>14</sup> Ibid.

<sup>15</sup> Ibid., 213.

Sixth, it was not until the mid-twentieth century that “new documents from the ancient world were discovered and translated, including the Dead Sea Scrolls.”<sup>16</sup> These documents gave the church a better understanding of the political, social, and religious culture of Jesus’ day, as well as a reason to question long-held traditions and assumptions in light of new historical possibilities. Finally, the church—both Protestant and Catholic—suffered through some major controversies and criticisms in the late Twentieth century, causing it to pause and do some “serious self-examination.”<sup>17</sup> A winning sports team does not tend to examine its goals and practices—unless setbacks and losses cause some major re-evaluation and changes in tactics.

In his book, *Life Together in the Way of Jesus Christ*, Dan Stiver discusses the great paradigm shift in the last quarter century: the move from a modern to a post-modern world. Such a major shift in thinking—with the added rise of multiculturalism and religious pluralism—would naturally cause the church to rethink some of its most fundamental beliefs—including its primary understanding of the gospel and the church’s enduring mission.<sup>18</sup>

### **Putting the Pieces Together**

The church has finally begun to recover Jesus’ message of new life in God’s Kingdom, but the real task for the contemporary evangelical church will be to come up with a way of understanding, practicing, and communicating this fully-integrated salvation picture. The task is to reconcile God’s good creative work with humanity’s sin and suffering, Israel’s covenant history with Jesus’ saving theories, the Holy Spirit’s presence with the church’s purpose, future eternity with present ministry, final judgment and justice with full resurrection and restoration.

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<sup>16</sup> Ibid., 214.

<sup>17</sup> Ibid., 215.

<sup>18</sup> Dan R. Stiver, *Life Together in the Way of Jesus Christ: An Incarnational Theology of the Community of God*, 14. Manuscript to be published with Baylor Press next year.

First, the church will need to recover a basic understanding of the larger Christian *story*—of creation, crisis, covenant, rescue, and renewal.<sup>19</sup> This larger ‘meta-narrative’ can help people to understand the universal scope of God’s plans—especially in relation to God’s kingdom.

*Creation:* God existed before anything else began and wanted to share His love with others. He created the universe and everything in it to live under His perfect rule. God created people to live forever in His kingdom community—and to wisely care for all of His creation.

*Crisis:* The first humans decided to live their own way, ignoring God and rejecting His rightful rule over their lives. Humanity fell into *disharmony* with God, each other, and creation. Death, disease, and suffering entered the world—each generation feeling the devastating effects.

*Covenant:* Rather than destroying the world, God enacted a plan to rescue and restore it. He created the Jewish nation from one family—blessing them so they could bless the world. Their laws, festivals, and holy days pointed to God’s kingdom—and the coming savior-king.

*Rescue:* Jesus of Nazareth—God’s very one Son—was born into the Jewish nation in the middle of history. He announced God’s kingdom, taught people how to enter and live in it—promising that his dying and rising would bring God’s forgiveness and new life into the world.

*Renewal:* God’s kingdom continues to expand as more and more people trust in Jesus—learning to live in community and love others—pointing towards the day when Jesus will return to destroy sin, death, and evil; reconciling humanity and restoring creation to its original intent.

Knowing the larger Christian story can help people to see creation as inherently good—humanity originally made to live with God as wise stewards of His creation. God’s intention is not to destroy everything, helping people escape this evil world and go to heaven after death; but to bring His heavenly Kingdom to earth—rescuing and restoring everything to its original intent.

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<sup>19</sup> Brian McLaren’s *Secret Message of Jesus* (pp. 26-30) first introduced me to the idea of a “deep and grand story” in the Scriptures, with various acts such as creation, crisis, calling, covenant, etc.—although I have significantly modified his ideas for my own purposes here.

Second, the church will need to recover a fuller understanding of Jesus' *saving work*.

Christians who lack an understanding of God's larger story and Jesus' kingdom message tend to emphasize one aspect of salvation over the others. The church needs a holistic understanding of Jesus' saving work; one that takes into account his entire life—his incarnation, teachings, crucifixion, resurrection, ascension, and return—all set in the context of God's kingdom.

*Incarnation:* A fully-divine Jesus became fully-human and was born into the world (John 1:14). Only God was powerful enough to save the world, and only as a human could He take on death, disease, sin, and evil to do it (Heb. 2:14). Jesus' entrance into humanity opened a heaven-on-earth connection with God's kingdom, showing people that God was truly on their side—that humanity was indeed worth redeeming (John 3:16). By becoming human, Jesus was better able to personally relate to humanity and show them God's good intentions for the world (John 1:18).

*Teachings:* Jesus was able to show humanity what God is truly like and how God wants people to live. He explained the nature of God's kingdom using earthly parables and everyday stories—even correcting people's misinterpretations of it. He gathered his followers together in groups—teaching them how to live in God's kingdom, preparing them to form other learning communities, so they could show others how to enter God's kingdom and successfully live in it.

*Crucifixion:* Jesus was subjected to human cruelty and depravity on the cross, suffering rejection and death—a rebel king going up against the Roman Empire and the Jewish religious authorities—and losing. Yet Jesus claimed that he went to the cross on purpose—that somehow, in some way, his sacrificial death would re-establish God's Kingdom and bring people back to God. Various atonement theories have sought to explain how Jesus' crucifixion and death have made people finally and forever 'at-one' with God—yet no one particular model can do justice to Jesus' total work. Here we will take an introductory look at several of the more popular theories:

*Ransom theory:* God sent Jesus to exchange his life, freeing humanity from enslavement to the powers of sin, death, and evil. The problem is not that God was unable to defeat the evil powers holding humanity hostage; it is that humanity *freely* chose to disobey God—humanity voluntarily got itself enslaved. One thinks of the Exodus story—God freeing His people from slavery in Egypt—or Jesus’ mission to “give his life as a ransom for many” (Mark 10:45 TNIV).

*Recapitulation Theory:* God sent Jesus to live a perfect, sinless life; living completely faithful to God in a way that humanity could not. His sacrifice on the cross was the ultimate act of faithfulness. If the first Adam—by his disobedience—caused sin and death to rule over all; the second Adam—by his perfect faithfulness—makes salvation available to many (Rom. 5:17-19).

*Substitution Theory:* God sent Jesus, putting “the wrong on him who never did anything wrong, so we could be put right with God” (2 Cor. 5:21, MSG). If humanity had violated God’s kingly rule, hurting others instead of helping them, then Jesus—the perfect king—voluntarily put his life in our place, taking our penalty and punishment, declaring us not guilty before God.

*Example Theory:* God sent Jesus to give his life for ours, becoming the ultimate example of kingdom love and selflessness. Not only would people see God reaching out to the world in love—giving up His own life, His Son’s life, for humanity—but they would also be inspired to love others in God’s kingdom ways. Paul wrote: “Live a life filled with love, following the example of Christ. He loved us and offered himself as a sacrifice for us” (Eph. 5:2, NLT).

There are other atonement models to be sure—satisfaction, relational, victory, etc.<sup>20</sup>—but no one theory can encapsulate what Jesus fully accomplished in his crucifixion. Scot McKnight, author of *The Jesus Creed*, writes: “One surely can’t reduce the work of God for us to one story. It takes a series of stories because the atonement is more mystery than it is mechanics.”<sup>21</sup>

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<sup>20</sup> Stiver discusses the various atonement models, which are “complementary rather than competing,” 400.

<sup>21</sup> “Who tells the best atonement story?” Available from [jesuscreed.org/?p=791](http://jesuscreed.org/?p=791); accessed on Jul. 1, 2008.

*Resurrection:* Jesus permanently defeated death and destroyed Sin’s powerful hold on humanity by rising from the dead (Rom. 6:3-10). He proved that he really is God’s Son, the true Lord of the world—King over God’s kingdom (Rom. 1:4) He brought new life and new creation into the world (Rev. 3:14)—anticipating the day when creation will be restored (Rom 8:22-25). The resurrection is the ultimate sign that Jesus’ sacrifice was acceptable to God (Heb. 9:14)—that one event in history which demands serious inquiry into Christianity’s claims (Acts 17:31).

*Ascension:* Jesus ascended back to heaven to reign with God the Father (John 14:28), sending the Holy Spirit to be his transforming presence in the world—and humanity needs Him. Jesus said, “Unless someone is born again, he cannot see the kingdom . . .” (John 3:3, HCSB). We need God’s forgiveness, but we also need to be reborn—“new birth and new life through the Holy Spirit” (Titus 3:5, NLT). We were *dead* in our sins and need to be made *alive*. Through the Holy Spirit, Jesus can live in and through his people—extending his kingdom to the larger world.

*Return:* Jesus promised to return (or re-appear) just as he left—coming on the clouds of heaven to fully establish his kingdom. His people will rise to meet him in the air—similar to the way Roman citizens would come to the city outskirts to meet their victorious king, welcoming him in.<sup>22</sup> Jesus will bring final resurrection and transformation to all who trust in him—including judgment and punishment for those who do not. There will be no more death, disease, suffering, or evil—rather, a new heaven and earth, God once more dwelling among his people (Rev. 21).

Every part of Jesus’ life—his incarnation, teachings, crucifixion, resurrection, ascension, and return—is vital to a holistic understanding of Jesus’ saving work; reconciling humanity, restoring creation, and re-establishing God’s kingdom forever. The challenge for today’s church is to understand God’s larger salvation story, and share His kingdom message with the world.

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<sup>22</sup> I thank N. T. Wright for this cultural understanding of 1 Thess.4:17—a passage often used to justify rapture theology and end-times escapism. A little biblical-cultural understanding truly goes a long way.

### **An Invitation to the Kingdom**

Third, the church will need to recover a better method of *communicating* God's salvation. Quite often, the modern evangelical church has shared a limited or one-sided gospel message because it is far easier to share. It can be explained quicker and easier—with simpler steps for a new 'convert' to take: be sorry for your sins, believe that Jesus died for you, accept him into your heart, and go to heaven when you die. The challenge with communicating a larger Christian story and a holistic understanding of Jesus' saving work is that there are so many angles or aspects of the good news to keep in balanced-tension. How does one balance individual salvation *with* community participation, one-time conversion *with* life-long transformation, eternity later *with* mission now? Once again, the answer lies in Jesus' message of the kingdom of God.

*Individual salvation vs. community participation:* The modern evangelical church has long tended to over-emphasize the Christian's individual relationship with God at the expense of their relationship with God's larger family of believers. Of course, having a right relationship with God is central to having right relationships with others, but both should be seen as essential. Humanity has become dangerously divided by differences in nationality, culture, race, religion, income, class, education, and gender—leading to sibling, family, neighborhood, workplace, city, national, and global conflicts that have claimed the lives of hundreds of millions of people in the last century alone. Jesus seeks to heal these painful fractures and divisions—to create a new kind of family that lives together in peace and unity. In God's kingdom, all can become children of God through faith in Jesus (Gal. 3:26), united with Christ in baptism (3:27), “no longer Jew or Gentile, slave or free, male and female . . . all one in Christ Jesus” (3:28, NLT). The church can point to the world's divisions—inviting people to *individually* put their trust in Jesus and his saving work, entering God's kingdom and becoming part of God's growing *community* family.

*One-time conversion vs. life-long transformation:* The modern evangelical church has long focused on justification—receiving God’s forgiveness and being declared right with God—over regeneration—receiving God’s Spirit and becoming spiritually alive—and sanctification—participating with God’s Spirit to become more like Jesus.<sup>23</sup> Part of sin’s disruption, however, is that humanity has lost an understanding of how to be truly human. People are generally self-centered, living for themselves and their own desires. People need to be reconciled into God’s kingdom community, but they also need to be transformed—literally “re-trained” to become the selfless, loving humans that God created us to be. The good news is that people can finally live in God’s kingdom—not only as a new family, but as a new *humanity*. Conversion is essential—people need forgiveness because “wrongdoers will not inherit the kingdom” (1 Cor. 6:9 TNIV). They need spiritual rebirth because “flesh and blood cannot inherit the kingdom” (1 Cor. 15:50). Yet they also need transformation—life-long participation in spiritual training and disciplines in partnership with God’s Spirit<sup>24</sup>—learning to live and love in God’s Kingdom like Jesus does.

*Eternity later vs. mission now:* The evangelical church has done well to emphasize life in eternity—albeit somewhat misplaced. While life after death might involve ‘heaven’ in some way, the Scriptures show humanity’s *ultimate* destination as a new heaven and earth (Rev. 21)—physical resurrection in a physical re-creation—with God dwelling among His people who wisely care for God’s creation.<sup>25</sup> While the church can encourage people to *anticipate* Jesus’ future return—forever destroying sin, death, and evil; reconciling humanity and restoring all creation—they can also encourage Christians to *participate* in that kingdom mission today. God’s people have been blessed so they can bless the world (Gen. 12:2), a new family and new humanity serving and giving in any way that builds the kingdom—pointing to God’s good news.

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<sup>23</sup> Stiver, 422.

<sup>24</sup> *Ibid.*, 432.

<sup>25</sup> Roger Olson, *The Mosaic of Christian Belief* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2002), 341.

## Conclusion

Christianity is all about good news, and not just for Christians, but for the whole world. The modern evangelical church certainly has been evangelistic, but the message seems to have gotten lost along the way—now focused largely on individualism and escapism. Yet according to Jesus, the good news centered on God’s Kingdom. God is rescuing, restoring, and transforming people’s lives, helping them to live, love, and grow together in community—anticipating the day when sin is destroyed and creation restored, sharing God’s blessings with the rest of the world.

The message of Jesus and the kingdom has largely been lost throughout various periods of church history, yet this kingdom concept has seen some resurgence in the last few decades. Hopefully, the modern church can recover a larger vision of God’s *story*—of creation, crisis, covenant, rescue, and renewal. The church can help people to understand the goodness of God’s creation—and humanity’s role as wise caretakers of it. People can understand the reason for sin and suffering, as well as God’s good intentions to judge evil and rescue and restore all things.

The modern church also needs to recover a fuller understanding of Jesus’ *saving work*—his incarnation, teachings, crucifixion, resurrection, ascension, and return. No particular aspect or atonement theory fully illustrates how Jesus makes people ‘at-one’ with God; rather, they all add to the larger picture. The church can emphasize various aspects or angles of Jesus’ life and work that might resonate with different people in their particular life-situations.

Finally, the modern church can recover better ways of *communicating* God’s salvation. The world suffers from endless divisions, selfishness, and hopelessness, but Jesus offers good news: eternal life in God’s kingdom. The church can emphasize both individual salvation and community participation, one-time conversion and life-long transformation, eternity later and mission now—a salvation that truly saves, good news that really is good news—for the world.

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