

EVANGELISM - A PRIORITY OR THE PRIORITY?

For many of us evangelism takes priority over good works or social justice. We are inclined to put the individual's salvation as a priority over societal transformation. Donal Hagner (WORD Biblical Commentary Matthew 1-13, p. 19) writes that save in Mt 1:21 refers to "a national-political salvation." Bryant Myers of World Vision, basing evangelism on Acts, calls for deeds to precede our evangelistic message. when evangelicals raise questions about evangelism and social change, we must be open to the Spirit expanding our thinking!

1. Read Matthew 1:21 - See Mott note below. Do you agree or disagree? Why?
2. Read Romans 8:18-23. The creation and we ourselves groan and have hope (v. 20, 22-23). Are first fruits of the reign of God in our midst then at work in both us, creation and all society? Comment.
3. Read Acts 2:5-15, 22; 3:9-12, 19. In these first two preaching situations note that mighty works of God happened before Peter preached the gospel (2:6, 3:11). How do deeds and works relate to our words? Do they come first in evangelism?

"When the Bible says that Jesus came 'to save his people from their sins' (Matt 1.21), it means that he will deliver them from the political and social consequences of their sins as well as root out the sin itself. God's saving concern cannot be restricted. Salvation extends to the whole of creation (Rom. 8.18-23) ... Concern for inner personal commitment to God is part of the concern for the reconciliation of all creation. Political and social concern for the created world is motivated by God's grace within the individual. As servants of God, we must make both tasks our own if we would be true to either." (Stephen Mott, Biblical Ethics and Social Change, Oxford, 1982, p. 118, 127.)

A BIBLE STUDY ON MATTHEW 28:16-20

The great commission is one of our great Bible passages. Jesus has the power. Jesus sends us out. Jesus will be with us. We are to baptize and so the disciples did. In fact after their first sermon, 3000 were saved and baptized! (Acts 2:40). What a moving of the Holy Spirit!

We are also told to "make disciples of all nations." Traditionally we understand this command to go to all nations, not just Israel, but to the Gentiles. But does it say more? (See notes below)

1. Read Matthew 28:16-20. Of whom does Jesus commission us to make disciples? Individual persons, gentiles, ethnic groups, people, nations? Or all of these?
2. Jim Russell (see below) write of making nations disciples. Could we make a massive Christian effort to do that? How would you proceed?
3. Jurgen Moltmann wrote that our mission of liberation in the light of hope is economic, political, societal, ecological and personal (*Ecumenical Review*, July 1974, p. 425-9). Do you agree? Faith-based community organizations relate to the political, social and economic sectors of the city. Is such work faithful to our mission?

"A Christian world - and life-view embracing world questions, societal needs, personal education ought to arise out of Matt. 18:18-21 as much as evangelism does. Culture depends on such a view ... A sorry answer lies in the abandonment of social fields to the secularist." Dr. Harold John Ockenga in the Introduction to THE UNEASY CONSCIENCE OF MODERN FUNDAMENTALISM by Carl F. H. Henry, 1947, p. 14

"Our Lord's mandate requires every Christian to participate in the discipling of our nation. ... Certainly a far more timely and fruitful purpose would be to organize a massive Christian effort to disciple our nation: a total mobilization of all Christians and their spiritual and material resources to disciple our nation. Now, there is a biblical goal worthy of such a gathering!" AWAKENING THE GIANT, Jim Russell, Zondervan, 1996, p.31, 37.

A BIBLE STUDY ON HUNGER AND EXPLOITATION

New Testament scholar Herman Waetgen states that Luke's gospel is addressed to the rich and powerful while Mark is to the poor and Matthew to the dispossessed. Luke begins his gospel with five messages from the advent-angel. Of one, the Magnificat (1:46-55). William Barclay writes of the three revolutions being announced: 1) a moral revolution(v.51); 2) a social revolution (v.52); and 3) an economic revolution (v.53). And it is all in the framework of magnifying (v.46), rejoicing (v.47) and mercy (v.50). What a wondrous hymn!

Questions

I. Read Luke 1:46-55. Why are there five angel stories to begin Luke? What effect would the angel stories have upon the rich and powerful?

2. How does this threefold revolution affect the hungry and lowly (oppressed)? See v.51-53. Is Mary one of them? (the same Greek word is used in v.48 and v.52 - lowly)

4. Read James 4:1-10. Compare the proud and humble in James to the Magnificat(see 4:6). What are the lifestyle choices'? Relate them to hunger and war.

"It has be said that religion is dope, the opiate of the people; but as Stanley Jones said, 'the Magnificat is the most revolutionary document in the World.'".. 'He had filled those who are hungry.

∴ those who are rich he has sent away.' That is an economic revolution. A non-Christian society is an acquisitive society where each person is out to amass as much as they can get ... There is loveliness in the Magnificat but in that loveliness there is dynamite." (William Barclay, THE GOSPEL OF LUKE, Luke 1:46-57)

A BIBLE STUDY ON HOMELESSNESS

America's homeless, a varied group of people, are developing an alien or stranger culture of their own. Since mainstream culture has no place for them, they have (often involuntarily) become strangers in our society. They also may be hungry in need of food and/or naked in need of clothing. But they are also strangers (Mt 25:38, 44). Our society has responsibility to welcome strangers, a calling probably more difficult than providing food and clothing for the poor. The New Testament has two words it uses for stranger, one is *xenos* used in Mt 25 and Hb 13:1-2, meaning stranger. The other, *paroikos* means home beside and therefore stranger/alien/homeless as far as our mainstream culture defines home (1 Pet 1:17, 2:11, Lk 24:18). God has spoken through an angel stranger (Hb 13:1), via strangers to Abraham (Gen 18:10-15) and even through the stranger Jesus after his resurrection (Luke 24). How much we lose if we have nothing to do with strangers!

1. Read Matthew 25:31-46. Note this passage is about nations, not individuals. How do we deal with strangers in our nation? the homeless? the immigrant?

2. Read Luke 24:13-35. Jesus was called a visitor or stranger, one with a home along side. Was Jesus homeless? Should that be our way of living? Why not?

4. Read 1 Peter 1:13-2:12. Are Christians strangers and aliens in our society with another home (see 2:5, 11)?

“Lexical studies are virtually unanimous regarding the general and technical meaning and use of paroikos in the ancient world; adj.: ‘dwelling beside or near, neighboring’; subst: ‘neighbor, sojourner in another’s house’; generally, ‘alien, stranger.’ In this general sense paroikoi are strangers, foreigners, aliens, people who are not at home, or who lack native roots, in the language, customs, culture, or political, social, and religious allegiances of the people among whom they dwell.... Oikos circumscribes one of the most fundamental social, economic, political and personal realities of the ancient world. Oikos is my house and home with all its personnel and property, my family and lineage, my ‘given identity,’ the place where I ‘belong’ and exercise my personal and communal rights and responsibilities, my moral obligations.” (A ROME FOR THE HOMELESS, John Elliott, 1981)

“Agape (love) always implies philo-xenos (stranger love). Hence the latter play a significant role in ethical instruction. Christian love is expressed therein according to Jesus (Mt 25:35ff). It is an expression of agape (Rom 12:9) and philadelphia (v.10) according to Paul (v.13). The power of love to cover sins is fully worked out in it according to Peter (1 Pt 4:8f). ... The command applies to all disciples (Mt 25:35ff; Rom 12:13 etc). But in the Past philoxenia is in bishops and widows a special proof of fitness to serve the community (1 Tim 3:2; 5:10; Tit 1:8). (THEOLOGICAL WORDBOOK OF THE NEW TESTAMENT, “Xenos”, V:20-21)

A BIBLE STUDY ON THE RICH & SALVATION

Is it possible for a camel, Palestine's largest animal, to go through the eye of a needle, the smallest hole? Of course not, and so too is it impossible for a rich person to enter the kingdom of God? Kenneth Bailey, a Biblical scholar with twenty years experience in Middle Eastern peasant culture, assists us in understanding this challenging parable of the camel and the needle (Luke 18:18-30 and parallels). Bailey convincingly writes that "the major themes of this remarkable dialogue are inverted." There are five stanzas of verse 18 & 30, v. 19-20 & 29, v. 22 & 28, v. 23 & 27, v. 24 & 25. The climax comes in the middle with v. 24-25. Bailey shows the inversion on eternal life of the old and new requirements (v 29-20, 29), the new obedience explained and fulfilled (v. 22, 28), the too hard new obedience possible with God, and entering the kingdom. Bailey suggests that the Middle East context explains that family and property were ultimate values in that society. Jesus changes the commandments order to emphasize family (adultery & honor of parents) and property (steal). Peter states how the disciples have left "what is our's" (family and property). The translation should not be leaving their "homes" (like a trip).

1. Compare v. 18 & 30, 19-22 & 27-29, and 23 & 26. Do you agree with Bailey's structural analysis?
2. Now look at v. 24-25. Can a rich person enter the Kingdom of God? Can they be saved and still keep their wealth? Did the disciples leave all their wealth (v.28)? (See first note)
3. Renunciation of possessions (Luke 5:11, 28; 14:25f; 18:22), the practice of alms giving (Mt 6:2; Acts 10:2-4), and possessions in common (Acts 2:44-45, 4:32-35) suggest options regarding one's wealth. Can you give alms if you are without possessions? (see note 2)

"In the history of interpretation there are two attempts to soften the blow of the text (v. 25). One attempt is linguistic ... changing a vowel from kamelon to kamilon, rope or string. The textual evidence is slight and unconvincing. ... A second alternative comes from the Middle Eastern village scene (Farrar, 1835). Here peasant homes sometimes have a large set of double doors.... The small door is easily opened. Some commentaries explained that this is the "needle's eye". There is not the slightest shred of evidence for this identification. Though Peasant Eyes, Kenneth E. Bailey, 1980, p. 166-7)

"I have tried to show that the Scriptures, read as normative and not simply descriptive, challenge us to express our faith in God by sharing our possessions. Such sharing, indeed is a mandate of faith, for clinging to what one has is incompatible with faith in God and an expression of idolatry. But the shape of the mandate, I have also suggested, is as diverse as life's circumstances and requires not an ideology but hard thinking about the inevitable symbolic shape of our lives. ... I do not suppose that I have thereby resolved the ambiguities or diminished the mystery of being and having. (SHARING POSSESSIONS by Luke T. Johnson, 1981, p. 138)

A BIBLE STUDY ON MARK'S CHAPTER 16

Evangelicals have always been troubled by Mark's resurrection chapter ending at verse 8 even though it includes the news that "He is risen." We like to have it end as the other gospel resurrection appearances by adding v. 9-20 even though the best research and manuscripts suggest that they were added much later. But do we need these appearances in Mark? Can we possibly understand the ending differently? Some suggest that the abrupt end of Mark invites us to join the unfinished business of preaching the gospel to the ends of the earth.

1. Read Mark 16:1-6. What does Mark write about the crucifixion and the resurrection?
2. Read Mark 16:8. What are the feeling expressed here? How would you feel? Compare this fear with the disciple's fear (4:41; 6:50; 9:6; and 10:32).
3. Read Mark 16:7. What can be the message of Jesus "going ahead of you into Galilee?" Are we being led back to the beginning of Mark to organize as he? See 1:9; 1:14; 1:16; 1:28; 1:39; 3:7.

"The Gospel of Mark leaves us with unfinished business to preach the gospel to the ends of the earth. The ending (which is not an ending) becomes a never-ending story as the baton passes on to us to join in the race and spread the news. Mark's stunning ending raises the question, Who will tell the story? His Gospel is the account of the beginning of the gospel, will we now join in its continuation?" THE NIV APPLICATION COMMENTARY - MARK, by David E. Garland, Zondervan, 1996, p. 629.

"To sum up, there are all 163 in this passage, and, of these, 11 words and phrases do not occur elsewhere in this Gospel. ... it could not have been written by Mark." INTERNATIONAL CRITICAL COMMENTARY - MARK, Ezra P. Gould, 1905, p. 303, 302.