

I. Intro.: Heilsgeschichte review

We're not quite halfway through our YOTB emphasis where we've been following the Heilsgeschichte, God's interpreted holy history. As you recall, that history started with a **good creation**. But humans wanted to be equal with God and became violent, destroying the shalom peace and **shattering relationships** with God, each other, themselves and all creation. So God chose **Abraham** for the mission to start a chosen, shalom covenant people that would reveal God to the whole world so these broken relationships might be restored.

Commented [NBA1]: CSA -- Creation ... shattering ... Abraham

Yahweh created this People of God out of a mixed group of slaves through the **common bonding experience** of the Exodus liberation and the covenant with Yahweh at Sinai. They were to be a priestly missional people to the whole world. Functioning as a **theocracy**, with God as king, they were further formed in the wilderness. They came into Canaan, where they were **unfaithful to their chosenness**, when they took on the culture and gods of the Canaanites, rather than staying true to their calling as the People of God.

Commented [NBA2]: BTU -- Bonding experience ... theocracy ... unfaithful to chosenness

The people became even more unfaithful to their chosenness when they **abandoned the miraculous theocracy** to set up their own nation-state with an earthly king. They put two anti-missional boundaries around themselves:

Commented [NBA3]: ANG -- abandoned theocracy ... nationalistic ... geographical

1. **Nationalistic**, in which Yahweh became a national god, rather than the God of all nations
2. **Geographical**, in which Yahweh resided within a geographical area, and not in the whole earth.

As sad as this made Yahweh, out of steadfast love, he kept working with the people through his remedial will.

In the **fall and exile of Judah**, Yahweh smashed apart these two barriers the people had put together. Taken into exile in Babylon, the people **lost their kings, their land, and their nation-state**. This was judgment, but also a gracious new opportunity to be faithful to their calling to be the outreaching chosen, covenant shalom community. Along the way, the **prophets** envisioned a people faithful to their chosenness, a "light to the nations".

Commented [NBA4]: JKLNP -- Judah ... Kings ... Land ... Nation-state ... prophets

Then they returned from exile without a geographical nation-state and king. This was like a **second Exodus**, a second chance for the people to be faithful to their chosenness. **Ezra** led a renewal that helped save their identity, but unfortunately he didn't get it right either. He mixed together Yahweh and ethnicity. Yahweh became the god of the ethnic Jews. This **ethnocentrism** was now the third anti-missional boundary. They became defensive and ingrown, rather than missional and outreaching, creating a new false boundary around God and the people of God.

Commented [NBA5]: 3 E's -- Exodus ... Ezra ... ethnocentrism

During the **period between Old Testament and New Testament**, there was a continuing issue of how the People of God would relate to the larger culture. Again **this split the Jews**. Some adapted and acculturated with the Greek culture of the day, while the more conservative Jews were fiercely loyal to their faith, but alas still ingrown! **Jesus** was born and grew up in this religious heritage. **How would he carry forward** God's long-term salvation project in such a context?

Commented [NBA6]: PJJC – Period between testaments ...
Jews ... Jesus ... carry forward?

II. We saw a hint/preview of Jesus' mission last week in the Scriptures and message

A. Last week we saw that his baptism & temptations in the wilderness prepared him for his mission as God's messiah: a suffering servant king

B. Now in Luke as Jesus returns to his hometown of Nazareth up north in Galilee, he reveals what he will really be about

1. Apparently Jesus had already begun some ministry activities about 20 miles away from Nazareth, in Capernaum on the shores of Sea of Galilee ...
 - a) Gospel of Mark tells this parallel story in the Nazareth synagogue AFTER Jesus has already been quite active in Galilee
 - b) Jesus knows that his hometown people have already heard he was creating a stir over in Capernaum
2. As Luke tells it, Jesus sets out his mission platform in a rather dramatic fashion
 - a) He uses a Scripture passage from Isa. 61, which emphasized social charity and social justice
 - b) But instead of simply reading the passage and then perhaps making a few interpretive comments about it, he pauses to get their full attention.
 - c) Then he declares that in him, right now, this Scripture has been fulfilled! That certainly gets their attention!
3. Specifically he names 5 groups of people who, through him, are seeing God at work for them:
 - a) The poor hear good news
 - b) Release is announced to the captives
 - c) The blind recover their sight
 - d) The oppressed can go free, and
 - e) Those in debt have their debts canceled

C. So what are the works of God that Jesus is going to be doing as he begins his ministry? What did he come to do?

1. I'll speak to these questions shortly, connecting w/ the broader salvation history
2. But before we look to the biblical story for an answer, I'd like to get a more contemporary answer ... actually, an answer from you & from other Christians in American churches today

III. So let's take a little break from Luke chapter 4 ... Let's have a quiz on Christian pop theology:

A. "What was Jesus' mission?" (What was he trying to do?) If I were to ask you this question, how would you put your answer into a single sentence?

1. I won't go around putting some of you on the spot with these statements, but let me provide some of the most common answers you may hear from Christians in the U.S. these days:

a) To save our souls from hell



What was Jesus' mission?

Some common responses:

- To save our souls from hell.

b) To take us to heaven when we die

What was Jesus' mission?

Some common responses:

- To save our souls from hell.
- To take us to heaven when we die.

c) To take upon himself the punishment for our sin

What was Jesus' mission?

Some common responses:

- To save our souls from hell.
- To take us to heaven when we die.
- To take on himself the punishment for our sin

2. How many of you have heard one or more of these responses in a church somewhere? (*show hands*)

B. All of these answers have some truth to them, and you can find a biblical basis for all of them, **but I believe all 3 of them are skewed**, showing us a 1-dimensional Jesus, narrowly focused on saving souls

1. When it comes to our physical life on this earth (things like eating, work, relationships & possessions), this kind of Jesus only cares about these things insofar as he can get us to believe the right things & punch our "soul tickets" for heaven
2. All 3 of these responses heavily emphasize Jesus as the "Savior of my soul" but they give little weight to Jesus as the "Lord of my life"
3. All 3 responses could be summarized as purely "spiritual" answers to what Jesus came to do ... basically a non-earthly and non-physical mission

C. And herein lies a problem with the Jesus of popular Christianity

1. For hundreds of years, the mission and message of Jesus have been "spiritualized"
 - a) The essence of Jesus is often described as more about attitudes than about actions ...
 - b) Jesus is seen to be concerned only with the inward and not with the outward ... so, for instance, his fulfilling the Isaiah 61 passage is about spiritual blindness, or about spiritual captivity to evil spirits, or about poverty of spirit
2. But Jesus is a more holistic Savior than that ... a multi-dimensional Savior:
 - a) the best concise summary of the ministries of Jesus is contained in *Matt. 4:23* (*read*)
 - b) Jesus ministered to the whole person, not just to their souls

IV. If I were to give a one-sentence response to the question of the mission of Jesus, **here is how I might say it:**

V.

A. Jesus' mission was... to bring in the kingdom of God in all its fullness

What was Jesus' mission?

Some common responses:

- To save our souls from hell.
- To take us to heaven when we die.
- To take on himself the punishment for our sin
- To bring in the kingdom of God in all its fullness

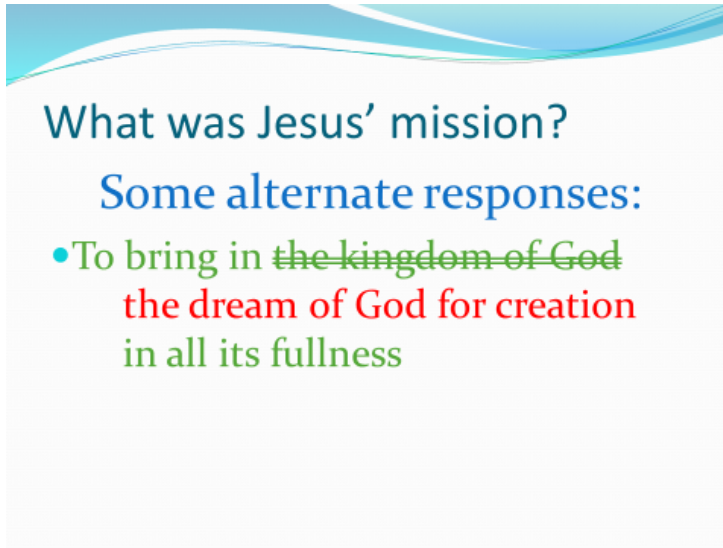
B. For some people who've grown up in churches, this phrase "kingdom of God" is very familiar, but on 2nd thought, maybe it's too familiar

- "Kingdom" is a word that has lost most of its power & edge today:
We don't live in kingdoms, we live in republics & democracies and, with the exception of a Saudi Arabian king in the news this week, the few kings we hear of have only ceremonial power within their governments
- "Kingdom of God": it kind of sounds imperialistic & out of step with our times
- A few years ago, pastor & author Brian McLaren recognized how this phrase "kingdom of God" seemed, in his words, "so last century".

2. In his book [The Secret Message of Jesus](#) (W Publishing Group, ©2006), McLaren proposed a few fresh metaphors for how we talk about this good news that Jesus brought.

C. So w/ thanks to Brian McLaren, **let's substitute some of these metaphors within my answer, to help us think holistically about what Jesus was trying to do:**

1. (What would it be like if we said the mission of Jesus was to bring in) *The dream of God for creation* (in all its fullness?)

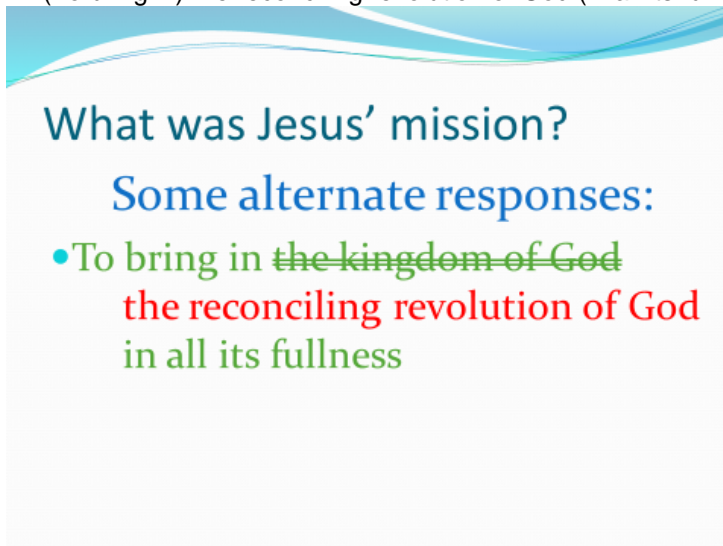


What was Jesus' mission?

Some alternate responses:

- To bring in ~~the kingdom of God~~
the dream of God for creation
in all its fullness

- a) Jesus helped fulfill the shalom dreams & visions of God, restoring God's original ultimate will for us to rely on God, rather than human violence, to deal with evil ...
- b) & we are invited to align our dreams with God's bigger dream
2. (To bring in) *The reconciling revolution of God* (in all its fullness)



What was Jesus' mission?

Some alternate responses:

- To bring in ~~the kingdom of God~~
the reconciling revolution of God
in all its fullness

- a) We middle-class & wealthy white Americans have tamed down the message of Jesus so much, it's lost its revolutionary edge ... so that it doesn't ruffle anyone's political feathers
- b) But if you go see the powerful movie Selma, (which I highly recommend) it's not so hard to view as a revolution what Jesus was bringing about
- c) Jesus did not get a hero's welcome in his hometown because he dared to name God favoring foreigners ... he challenged that ethnocentric box
- d) Jesus ruffled Roman political feathers so deeply in his day, that it ended up getting him killed!

3. (To bring in) *The network of God* (in all its fullness)

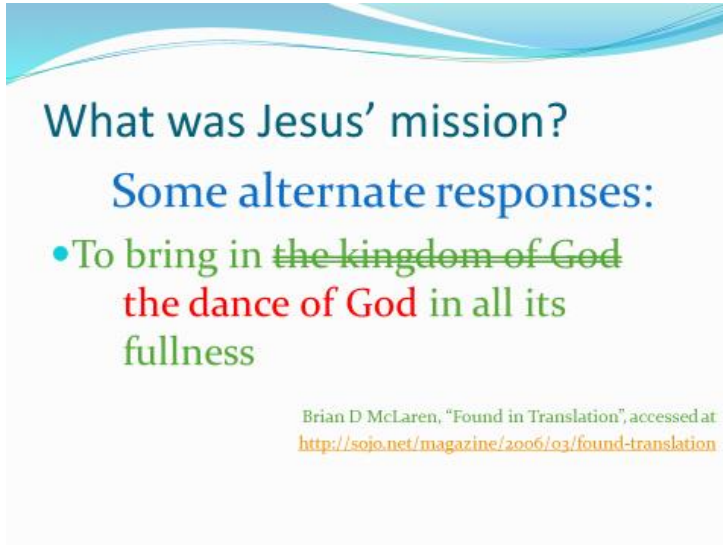
What was Jesus' mission?

Some alternate responses:

- To bring in ~~the kingdom of God~~ the network of God in all its fullness

- a) This is a much more interconnected and lifegiving image of what Jesus is about ... Our spirituality and our earthly behavior are intertwined and can't be separated out
- b) Jesus came to link with us in our relationships with God, ourselves, each other & all creation

4. (To bring in) *The dance of God* (in all its fullness)



- a) Some of us with “2 left feet” don’t get excited about this, while others can’t wait to be part of this metaphor! Our Beninese brothers & sisters are already doing their part on this ...
- b) The holy Trinity is often described as a 3-in-one mutual dance of Father, Son & Holy Spirit ...
- c) you could say Jesus came into the world to model for us a way of living in the rhythm of God’s music of love (Source: “Found in Translation” by Brian D McLaren, March 2006, accessed 1-23-15 at <http://sojo.net/magazine/2006/03/found-translation>)

VI. In all of these ways of talking about the mission of Jesus, **we're presenting a Jesus who showed the good news of God as relevant for every aspect of life: economic, social, political and spiritual.**

A holistic Jesus

- Lord of all parts of our lives:
 - Economic
 - Political
 - Social
 - Spiritual

A. And lest you think I'm dismissing the spiritual dimension of Jesus' mission, **remember that the Gospel of Luke**, which is known to especially highlight issues of social justice, **also paints a very spiritual picture of Jesus**

1. This is the 6th Sunday now in Dec. & Jan. when our worship has focused on passages from Luke preparing us for Jesus and introducing us to him
2. This writer of the most socially-minded Gospel, goes out of his way to describe Jesus' ministry and the events leading to it as Spirit-filled
 - a) In the 1st four chapters of Luke, the Spirit of God active with people is mentioned twelve times!
 - b) Even before we see the Spirit associated with Jesus, God's Spirit has already been at work in Zechariah, Simeon, John the Baptist, Elizabeth and Mary
 - c) For Luke the storyteller, the story of Jesus from its earliest beginnings is no mere human tale, but one saturated with God's Spirit

B. As Christians we declare that Jesus of Nazareth was much more than just a teacher & social activist whose message disturbed those who were in economic and political power.

1. His was a spiritual mission indeed, but not because it only had to do with otherworldly “spiritual” matters,
2. It was a spiritual mission because it had to do with the work of the Spirit of God, wherever that Spirit is at work

VII. Conclusion

A. In the person and mission of Jesus of Nazareth, God’s long Heilsgeschichte over thousands of years was finally getting a sharper focus, taking shape in a very concrete way ...

1. In the next few weeks we will hear more specifics of what Jesus the Messiah taught, including next Sunday hearing in various formats the entire teaching of the Sermon on the Mount.
2. Then over the 6 weeks of Lent, we will walk with Jesus through Holy Week,
 - a) We will see how the events of the last week before his death showed us the depths and radical reach of God’s love ... events which also changed forever how we connect to this Heilsgeschichte

B. So pick your kingdom metaphor for what Jesus was about ...

As always along this salvation history journey, I invite you to hold your own story alongside of God’s story [PPT McLaren combined]

1. How are you helping to bring in the kingdom of God?
2. In what ways are your dreams aligned with God’s dream for creation?
3. How are you a peaceful co-revolutionary with Jesus?
4. How are your activities in sync with the network of God?
5. Are the movements of your words and actions keeping the dance of God flowing gracefully?

C. Please take a few silent moments to let the Spirit of God help you make these connections ...

What was Jesus' mission?

- To bring in (the kingdom of God)
the dream of God for creation
the revolution of God
the network of God
the dance of God
in all its fullness.

Brian D McLaren, "Found in Translation", accessed at
<http://sojo.net/magazine/2006/03/found-translation>