

306 *But is Wright right?*

Last night I watched the first of three 30-min episodes of *A vicar's life*, a documentary on church life in rural Herefordshire with its 'we are an aging congregation' trying to be 'relevant to young people', and I squirmed. Yes, I know it was the media's view, but still, I couldn't help comparing it with the world-upside-down, first-century church.

And yes, I know, you could take me to a flourishing inner-city church with hundreds of young people, or to some of the mega-churches around the world, but I'm still worried.

So let me take you to a Wright-ism. This was quoted in a book edited by his son Oliver (NTW's italic, my colour):

To sum up... the work of salvation, in its full sense, is (1) about whole human beings not merely souls; (2) about the present, not simply the future; and (3) about what God does through us, not merely what God does in and for us.

I haven't failed to notice the two merely's and one simply, which are essential to his thesis here, but is he right, even? Let's check it out.

For starters, surely the essential part of us *is* our souls, isn't it? That's what will be preserved when our bodies die, isn't it? [I think I can see NTW's response: 'The body/soul dichotomy owes more to Plato and his mates in ancient Greece than to NT teaching!']

Anyway, get any pamphlet or book on what 'the work of salvation is about' and I'll bet you come away with the impression that it's essentially about how **my** soul can be saved, so when **I** die **I** will be with God in heaven – in the **future**. Once I'm saved, I can do something useful here and now, but that's not what salvation is 'about'.

Even if we add the stuff I've got excited about, since the start of my journey (faith is about relationship and mystery, not propositions and a transaction), we've still not moved far from 'me and my salvation'.

Back to the early church – what was the 'good news' then? Well, they wouldn't have a clue about all this 'going to heaven' malarkey. Yes, if we die before 'That Day' when heaven finally and fully comes to earth, we'll be 'in God's domain'; so yes, 'heaven' in one sense, but only as a temporary holding situation.

No, the early church was (and we should be?) mainly concerned with bringing God's kingdom into the here and now – in anticipation of the full-and-final. That's why Jesus told us to pray: 'thy kingdom come'.

That gives me a different kind of nervousness: trying to insist today that 'Jesus is Lord' could bring us into conflict in all sorts of ways. It would certainly be safer to stick to the 'gospel' as I was taught it: a personal relationship with God, so I'm saved, and then I simply try to persuade friends and family to believe and be saved too.

But then maybe Wright *is* right.

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