

309 “Sinners in the Hands of an Angry God”

Studying the book I mentioned^[307] about the Lord’s Prayer,¹ I’m finding it very broadening to read about the Aramaic words that Jesus actually spoke, as opposed to the (English translation of the) Greek translation of those words.

After my last musings,^[308] something suddenly stuck me: we’ve got the gospel totally the wrong way round; yet our Loving Father has still used our fumbling, messed-up version to draw millions of people to know his wonderful love.

But think how many *more millions* would come to Christ if we turned the good news back the right way round – the Lord’s Prayer way round! (Love → sin, not sin → love.)

- Start with God: the wonderful loving, prodigal father that Jesus preached about.
- Then the kingdom (come!): people celebrating God’s reign of love.
- Then the survival of human kind (daily bread): we can (only) survive if we help one another (globally).
- Forgiveness: we can (only) survive if we learn to forgive one another.
- Strength to carry on: for when we’re tempted to give up.
- Fighting together against evil: including institutional evil.
- It all revolves around Christ the king: his power, his kingdom and his glory.

I guess that’s more *why* we need the gospel; the *how* is the story of Jesus, as related in the Gospels.

But why do I say it’s the wrong way round? Jesus never ever taught about God taking (some) people FROM earth to heaven – but that’s exactly what the church has taught for the past few centuries – no, it’s about bringing Christ’s kingdom TO earth.

OK, millions of people have got (and still do get) drawn to know God’s love through that totally wrong view, but at what cost to people who – quite reasonably – have rejected it?

This wrong view is epitomised by Jonathan Edwards’ famous 1741 sermon, as per my title, which is said to be the start of ‘The Great Awakening’ – millions of people coming to faith. This Wikipedia quote² makes the wrong-way-roundness clear, I think (my bold):

Three teachings that Methodists saw as **the foundation of Christian faith** were:

People are all, by nature, “dead in sin”.

They are “justified by faith alone”.

Faith produces inward and outward holiness.

¹ *Prayers of the Cosmos* Neil Douglas-Klotz, 1990

² https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/First_Great_Awakening

I'd rather concentrate on the positive, but putting the negative alongside can sometimes be helpful. The following contains some gross generalisations and is not properly thought out but let's concentrate on the vision of how a new 'General Awakening' might be more like what Jesus preached:

From...	To...
Saving souls away to heaven	Building the kingdom, now
Ruled by fear (shame, punishment, wrath)	Ruled by love (restoration, adoption, forgiveness, grace)
'Are you in or out?!' (isolation, religion)	'You belong!' (community, communion)
Worthlessness (original sin, shame)	Supreme value (original goodness, God says: 'I'm especially fond of you')
Focus on moral rules (what we do , ' <i>doing</i> ')	Focus on building faithful relationships (who we are , ' <i>being</i> ')
Bible interpretation is fixed ('letter')	Bible speaks, from age to age ('spirit'/Spirit)
Obedience	Faith-full questioning
Preaching at people	Listening to people

Happy to chat about this.

Paul Bev. 23.1.24