

95 *Why is it so revolutionary?!*

Both in thinking through the message of Romans and, for my post-Alpha group, thinking about the Lord's prayer (Tom Wright, 'The Lord and His prayer' is helping me hugely), I'm coming up with the same sort of thoughts:

Personal salvation (wonderful as it is) and even a personal relationship with God (the fantastic reality of which started me on this journey) will not 'turn the world upside down'.

Only the coming of the kingdom of God can (and did!) do that.

'Yes, yes, Paul, but we do believe in the kingdom of God. Jesus is king in my life.'

But have we any real clue what 'the kingdom' means? I certainly didn't. Could I tell you what 'kingdom' means? what it looks like? where it is? how I reach it? But 'the kingdom' was what Jesus talked about incessantly, i.e. it was what the early church (those who wrote the New Testament) recorded Jesus as saying.

So how the blazes *did* those few frightened disciples turn the world upside down?!

Obviously it wasn't by preaching for personal salvation, but maybe it was that their preaching was accompanied by 'signs following'? That's been a popular approach in the past few decades, and churches where miracles are seen to be taking place are, I'm sure, growing.

But why did things so totally explode in the first century?

What I'm feeling my way towards is that it's to do with 'at *just the right time*, when we were still powerless, Christ died for the ungodly.' (Ro 5:6)

Why was it 'just the right time'? Because it was God's time. God had been working with the Jews for centuries, starting with the faith of Abraham – what a guy! We all know the pattern: the Jews faithfully worship God, then they begin to go astray; they are warned that if they don't focus on God it will all go horribly wrong; they think other things are more important than God (they give other things their worth-ship); and things do go horribly wrong – usually they end up in exile; then they turn back to God; so God rescues them; but once again they start to worth-ship other things (giving other things their worth-ship = idolatry: we still do it today, big time!).

So now, when Jesus comes on the scene, the Jews are in 'exile' (albeit in Israel), and they are desperate for another exodus; waiting for it, longing for it.

Have you ever seen that experiment where you dissolve crystals in hot water at then cool it down – nothing happens! But then you drop a single tiny crystal into the solution and... Bang!... a massive and beautiful network of crystals develops. That's my picture of 'just the right time'.

One of my favourite verses, i.e. which I can relate to most strongly, is: '*Were not our hearts burning within us while he talked with us on the road and opened the Scriptures to us?*' Lk 24:32

In my stumbling way, I'm beginning to see more of what the kingdom is about (I have to say mainly due to Tom Wright), and why it's so fundamental, why the early church exploded. The kingdom is the fulfilment on earth of the pattern established through the Jews: our purpose in life is to live on earth, giving worth-ship to God – and God alone, or it's not God we're worshipping.

For the early church it was because (as Jesus taught them) the kingdom came *on earth* (as in heaven) that (a) they made such a massive impact (b) they suffered – they shared in Jesus' suffering. 'The kingdom is among you now!' said Jesus. Yes, ultimately and wonderfully on the new earth, when heaven comes down to earth, but heaven on earth does start here and now. That's why it sometimes feels so wonderful, and sometimes life seems like hell on earth, but through the pain, we know that Jesus has triumphed over evil, and we're called to bring that triumph into real everyday situations now, insofar as we can.

That's a bit muddled, sorry, but that's how my thinking is going – maybe you can relate to this, maybe not. Can you see how it relates to the Lord's revolutionary prayer?

Throughout my Christian life, the 'wrong worth-ship' has been trying to understand the Bible so that I can know what is RIGHT, know the right interpretation (and then convince others) – that has been my idolatry. And given the absolutely awful ways that churches have split and argued and split and argued again, I'm guessing that I'm not alone in the idolatry of thinking my interpretation of the Bible is RIGHT.

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