

### 393 Hoping against hope?

It's all very well me spouting about exciting new (well, different from what we've been taught) ideas from Greg Boyd, Brian McLaren and Tom Wright, but let's face it, we're in a mess – a very big mess! The world is in a mess both environmentally and politically (the two are not unconnected), and the church (organised religion) is in a mess. So how do I (or you) feel about that? Hopeless? Or hopeful?

I think it very much depends on what kind of God you believe in.

Jesus' disciples thought Jesus was the Messiah, and the Messiah was going to sort out the mess (of Rome's terrible tyranny over them). But that tyranny killed their leader! They were then totally hope-less. So why was that not the end of the Jesus-story? How did they turn into such an amazing band of hope-full men and women? So hopeful that they were willing to sacrifice their own lives! How did those largely uneducated people turn their world upside down?

They changed the world by beginning to realise that God is actually like Jesus – very different from the 'my god is more powerful than your god' ideas of old. God conquers evil by the irresistible power of self-sacrificing love: Jesus showed them that; Jesus did exactly that; and Jesus said they would do 'even greater things'. <sup>Jn 14:12</sup> There is hope!

**But the problems are so large; I feel totally helpless.** Sure, but what kind of God do you believe in? God loves the world, so don't you think God will have a plan? I've come to believe that God is working on an underground movement. God is coordinating people in all walks of life (in all religions too, perhaps?) to see that real change doesn't come through coercion – whether human or divine – but by the power of self-sacrificing love.

**But surely God must judge people for some of the terrible things they did/do/are doing?**

Sure, but that's not up to me; I have to trust God for that. I have to do what I can do, which is to commit myself to emulating that self-sacrificing love. I can't change the world but I can change me – and maybe I can make a difference in my local community?

**But doesn't the Bible teach that God is going to judge people and destroy evil?** Sure, that's how we've all been taught to think, by our religious leaders, but didn't Jesus show us a better way? I may say, 'Obviously, Xyz Person is so evil that God must surely punish them for what they've done!' but where do I draw the line when I'm judging others? How do I decide who should be judged and who forgiven? And who am I to say, '*God ought to...*'?! Rather, 'Do not judge, or you too will be judged.' <sup>Mt 7:1</sup> Yikes!

'Love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you' <sup>Mt 5:44</sup> – clear and unequivocal, but so hard in practice. Yet there *is* hope: the ultimate power of God's love!

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