

432 Dream with me!

What if, when it says, ‘God so loved the world’, that was actually what it meant? What if God actually loves the *whole of the world* and *all its people*? What if God is bigger and more powerful than we thought? What if God’s plan is not just to rescue a relatively small number of people and take them *out* of this world to somewhere/something called ‘heaven’, where we’ll all be happy, after all the misery and suffering here?

What if God has a plan to actually come back to this world, in all his glory, and then the whole world would live in love, joy and praise to God? What if that were God’s plan all along? Oh! But it is, isn’t it?!

Maybe this vision of ‘all the world’ was what inspired the great missionary movements that we, as students, were fed on: brave Christians (many from Cambridge, hurrah!) went to preach the gospel to all nations. We knew what the Bible taught, so we took our form of Christianity and set it up in all four corners of the earth (overriding the local cultures).

Sorry, my *negative* feelings just slipped in, but see how strong our prescriptive tendencies are!^[431]

So now, today, how is God going to use his power to sort out the mess? And, again, I don’t just think God wants to snatch a few lucky people out of the mess. Is it possible that God is big enough and clever enough to use different people from different countries, and even of different religions (horrifying thought!) – or even no religion – to help sort out the mess?

I know many of you will think I’m now totally and utterly heretical: we are right; we have the Bible; we know what God wants; beware compromising your faith by working with people who don’t know the truth! But then Christians can’t even agree among themselves which particular prescriptive view is ‘true’. I’m sure we all know folk who have moved from church to church in search of one that is truly biblical.

Finally, back to my personal concern: my lovely friends and family who don’t yet know the wonderful joy and peace and community and love and forgiveness and blessing, plus millions of other things that are only available in Jesus – the way, the truth, and the life!

When the early church ‘preached the gospel’, were they announcing, ‘Jesus died to offer you personal salvation’? No, they were really excited by the good news that ‘Jesus has defeated death, and Jesus is Lord of the whole world!’

God is way, way more Lord-like than we ‘Bible-based’ Christians have worked out. God can work in amazing ways in different situations, in different cultures. Ours is to keep reading our Bibles, keep allowing the Spirit to renew our minds, and be willing to change and move, rather than being fixed in our prescriptive, ‘we know what’s right’ attitudes.

Sorry, but that’s what I think.

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