

Gospel & Kingdom

by Murray Capill

One of the great tasks of the church is to equip and train people to serve God. But very often we have a narrow view of what that means. We equip and train people to serve God in the Church but often we do little to equip them for serving God where they spend the majority of their time - at work, at home and in the community.

This narrow view of equipping the saints is sometimes bolstered by a separation of "gospel work" and "kingdom work". Sometimes in Reformed circles these two spheres of work are differentiated quite sharply and even played off against each other. By "gospel work" we tend to mean evangelism, or more broadly, teaching the Bible and building people up in Christ. Gospel work is church work and overtly Christian work. By "kingdom work" we often mean

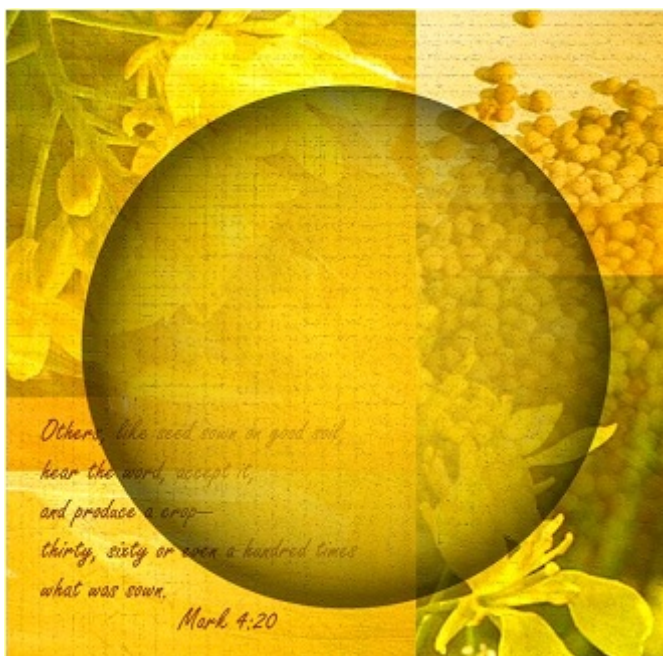
living every part of life under the Kingship of Jesus Christ. Kingdom work typically refers to Christian service beyond the walls of the church as God's people try to make a difference in politics, law, business, education, industry, family and society. Kingdom work may also flow over into a range of "deed" ministries, where Christians try to make a difference to the lives of the poor and marginalised.

Both are great emphases, but the problem with defining things this way is that we separate two things that belong inextricably together. We create a false dichotomy

between the two. We may even create the impression that gospel work is best, but if someone is not wired for that then at least they can get into some kind of secular work (not even "kingdom work"), and earn money to support gospel ministry! The dichotomy can also set up a swing of the pendulum: sometimes churches are passionate about a kingdom perspective or a Reformed world and life view, while barely engaging in overt evangelism. At other times churches strongly embrace gospel ministry but largely ignore the calling of Christians to be salt and light in society.

These distinctions fail to reflect the central message of the New Testament: the kingdom is the good news. Jesus preached

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"the good news (gospel) of the kingdom of God" (Luke 4:43, 8:1). The good news he proclaimed was that God's kingdom was breaking into this world. His parables provided sketches of the kingdom; his miracles gave glimpses of its transforming power; his preaching laid out its manifesto; his death secured access for sinners into the kingdom, and in his resurrection and ascension he was exalted as king.

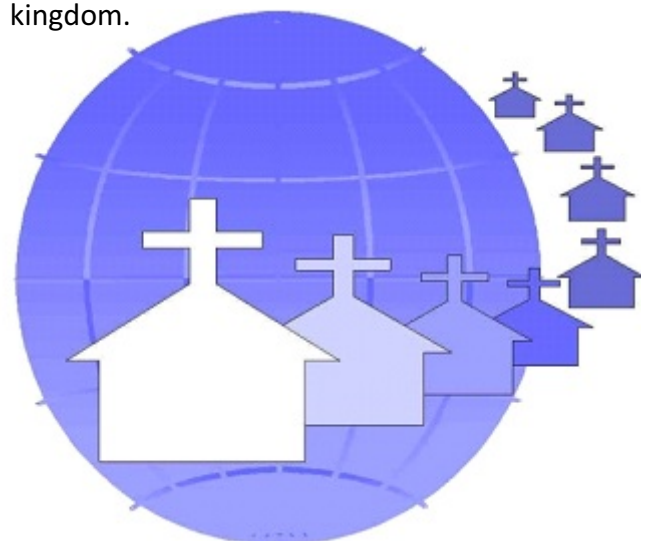
What is so good about the kingdom is that God's reign and rule is radically different from the kingdoms of this world. His kingdom is good news for the poor, the broken, the oppressed, the needy and the sinful. It is a kingdom of justice and righteousness, not oppression and wickedness. It is a kingdom wide open to all who repent and believe in Jesus. It is not just open to the rich, the popular, the successful or the religious. It is a kingdom where the last will be first and the first last; where the proud will be humbled and the lowly exalted. It is a kingdom where money doesn't matter, race is immaterial and social status means nothing. It has completely upside-down values. It is also a kingdom that has come and is coming. It is growing in size and influence and one day will fill heaven and earth.

This is the good news, the gospel. We must always, therefore, preach the gospel in kingdom terms. We must always proclaim that the gospel is more than the good news of personal salvation. It is the great news that God is reclaiming this world for himself, driving back injustice, oppression, impurity and ungodliness, putting all his enemies under his feet, and exalting his appointed King, Jesus

Christ. This is a grand gospel, not just about me and the forgiveness of my sins, but about God and his reign being re-established in this world.

That has implications for both churches and individuals. For churches it means we have to get our hands dirty in our communities. We have to get involved in the lives of the hurting, needy and broken. The kingdom is for them. For individuals, it means that as those who now belong to the kingdom of God, we must live and work and act as kingdom agents. We must always live for the radical values and attitudes of the kingdom. We become outposts of the kingdom of God wherever we are - at home, in business, in the workplace, at school or university, on the sports field or at the movies. The people around us - friends, family members, bosses, workmates, customers and clients - should encounter in our lives, the good news of the kingdom. Of course not all of them will see it as good news. We will often be rejected or regarded as strange. But some people will be intrigued, and we will have opportunity to give a reason for the hope that we have and share with them the good news of Christ and his kingdom.

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So when we go to work, we don't just work hard because it's good to work hard. Nor do we just work hard to make money (money is of course useful and necessary, but many people work hard in voluntary positions or as stay-at-home mums, and their job is not rendered meaningless because they make no money). Nor do we go to work simply to have a base for witness (there may or may not be opportunities for witness, but the fact is, work pre-dates the need for gospel witness. Work was around before the fall and has a more fundamental purpose). And we don't go to work to do something that is basically meaningless, to which we try to add some gospel (church) work after hours so as to feel as if we are doing something worthwhile.

No. We go to work, whatever our job, to serve the King in the mission that he has on earth - the mission of advancing his kingdom. As we live for him in our area of work, God reclaims more ground for himself. As more people are saved, more of society is affected by the values of the kingdom of God. Sometimes the result will be persecution. Sometimes the result will be great opportunities to share the gospel. Sometimes the result will be that a small corner of the world is a better place. Always the result will be that Christ, the King, is honoured.

So as Christians we are not called to do either gospel work or kingdom work. We are all called to "gospel-of-the-kingdom" work wherever we are. Churches must strengthen people for this, equipping them to serve God in the whole of life. They must help people to be passionate about the gospel of the kingdom and its vast implications.

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