

# **Intersection Conference 2017**

Costa Mesa, CA

## **Jesus' Gospel of the Kingdom And His Concomitant Aims**

*As A Basis For Discipleship, Mission  
and Church Renewal*

### **Part One**

#### **INTRODUCTION/ORIENTATION:**

- Orientation to our work the next three days...
  - Content
  - Cohorts
  - Friends and fellowship
- Orientation to our work the next five years...
  - Annual Intensives
  - Learning Communities: (Smith) -- Re-habitation requires new *counter*formative *practices*, not just new *thoughts*...
- I am here as much as an evangelist as a teacher...

This is going to be serious, but, I hope, enjoyable work...

- Pace yourself; you might find yourself reacting in emotional ways—take a break, find a quiet spot

**My intentions through The Telos Collective** are important to me and motivated by love of my Anglican tribe and the whole church...

- But modest in scope (US) and humble by virtue of wanting to learn from both outside experts and ground-up colleagues...
- I know we need increased diversity...

**In the Gospel and aims of Jesus**, we are seeking a transcendent word, leading to transcendent purposes, models and methodologies for ministry:

- But with humble approach
- Thoughtfulness that is *actionable*
- That has no coercive intent
- No proprietary interest (celebrating any fruitfulness coming from The Telos Collective)
- Humble and non-anxious—leaving the outcomes to God...

**The presupposition that led me to create the Telos Collective:**

- Here I am working with Ben Meyer (*The Aims of Jesus*), Tom Wright (*Jesus and the Victory of God*) Dallas Willard (*The Divine Conspiracy*) and several missiologists...

- We need a fresh basis (and biblical!) to think about ministry: evangelism, discipleship and thus church renewal...
- Ministry needs a teleological motive; a purposeful aim; they are what unites our acts of ministry with their true end.
  - Ministry without a telos is too shallow to make our various activities have coherence...
  - A telos keeps us from religious and role-related boredom, apathy or discouragement
  - And a shared telos is the basis for leading a church: shared vision, values, priorities, practices, hiring/team-building and budget creation, etc.
- Without a telos, life and ministry are “a vanity and a chasing after the wind” (Ecclesiastes); or think of Jesus: drink of *that* water and you will thirst again...
- My experience suggests to me that Jesus is right: life happens...
  - Down a narrow way leading to life: the joyful, grace-filled gravitational pull of God’s telos...
  - Or a broad road leading to destruction: in self-centered pursuit of consumption to achieve private desires...

- Thus I am trying situate modern ministry in a story: from pre-creation intentionality → telos; to re-articulate Christin life and ministry in God's telos, thus sending us as his image-bearers *to* and *for* the world...

**I am acting as an evangelist:** James K.A. Smith—*You Are What You Love* = your ministry will reflect what you love...

- The finer points of Calvinism (or Wesleyanism)
- Anglican Intermural Politics
- High church VS Low Church
- Charismatic or not, etc.
  
- You are what you love and you may not love what you think you do...
  - I want us to learn to LOVE the aims of Jesus so much that everything naturally changes and aligns with that love/set desires...
  
  - What do you want? Is an important pre- and subconscious motivator for ministry. For our wants, longings and desires are at the core of our identity—they are the sources of our actions, attitudes and speech.
  
- Our work in the Telos Collective as an “imagination station that incubates our loves and longings... indexing our hearts toward God and his kingdom.”

- To be conformed to the image of Jesus is not only to think God's thoughts after him, but to desire what God desires—and that requires the recalibration of our heart-habits and the recapturing of our imaginations...

**This is the core purpose of the Telos Collective:** to come to love the aims of Jesus, his Gospel of the kingdom...

- Alasdair MacIntyre (*After Virtue*): We can't answer the question, *What ought I do?* Unless we first answer the question, *Of what story am I a part?*
  - The story of which I am a part—in which I am a character—determines just what counts as character, as virtue...
  - Smith: using a flute to roast marshmallows = this is a terrible flute! No; it is being used for the wrong purpose/telos...
- Smith: to be conformed to the image of God's son is not only to think God's thoughts after him, but to *desire* what God desires.
  - That requires the recalibration of our heart habits
  - The recapturing of our imagination
  - The shaping of what we perceive to be real before we even think about them

- Many young leaders in the last 20 years have tossed aside the church...frustrated with ministry being calibrated to the wrong telos...that was the problem—not the church, not leadership, not Sunday meetings or buildings or worship styles, etc!
- The telos for Christians, for the church is Jesus: his aims, his announcement, embodiment and demonstration of the Gospel of the kingdom

**Start with the beginner's mind** (*Presentation Zen*):

One who approaches life with a beginner's mind is fresh, enthusiastic....not burdened by old habits or obsessed about "the way things are done around here"...A beginner is open and receptive and is more inclined to say "why not?" or "let's give it a shot," rather than "it's never been done" or "that's not common."

Your expert mind will say that it can't be done (or shouldn't be done). Your beginner's mind will say, "I wonder if this can be done?"

If you approach a task with the beginner's mind, you are not afraid of being wrong. The fear of making a mistake, of risking an error, or of being told you are wrong is constantly with us...but if you are not willing to make mistakes, then it is impossible to be truly creative. If your state of mind is coming from a place of fear and risk avoidance, then you will always settle for the safe solutions.

**Someone might object:** The "aims of Jesus": How can I know such a thing? Can we know about things like

ultimate intention, definitive purpose and fundamental coherence? Heck: just going to the grocery store or listening to campaign rhetoric or paying attention to talk radio or cable TV leaves me spinning! How am I, therefore, supposed to place my confidence in the words and deeds of Jesus? I can I know that they cohere, as he taught, around his aims in and through the in-breaking of the kingdom of God? Aren't I just pretending? Aren't I just a reflection of my family of origin, of Western religion, etc? Aren't these kinds of choices just personal preferences?

These decisions are necessarily personal—and they do require a choice, a commitment that then leads (like science: Polanyi and Newbigin) to discovery and growth...

The biggest human choice: choose your teacher and follow their teaching...

### **Getting at the conscious aims** of Jesus: Mark 1.14-15:

- Jesus went into Galilee
- Proclaiming the good news **of** God.
  - Theology → Christology (aims) → missiology → ecclesiology (aims of the church cohere with the aims of Jesus)
- The time has come
- The kingdom of God has come near

- Repent
- Believe the good news!

This announcement by Jesus—if we hold him to be intelligent and competent—is paradigmatic for all Gospel ministries...shaping things thusly:

**Two Diagrams:** telling the wrong story has been deeply misleading:

**Thesis:** If we want fruit that in any approximates that of the early Jesus movement (John, Jesus, apostles), we must know and adopt the aims of Jesus: to do and teach as he said was right and best...

- Was Jesus smart? To what was he self-conscious? All the other rabbi's and groups had things to which they were conscious and stubbornly committed: Qumran; Herodians; Zealots; Sadducees; Pharisees...
- Did his proclamations about the full and final (eschatological promises) in-breaking of the reign/will of God point to, and correspond to reality? Did his teaching? His works of power? Or was he unaware of his own significance, just drifting through life spouting obscure sayings?
- What was his sense of mission, intention?
- What was his sense of vocation, calling, purpose?

- Did he understand these things meaningfully, coherently, concretely?
- What gave his teaching and deeds (his vocabulary, themes, tone and points differ with each conversation partner) a center of gravity—a controlling perspective?

**Answer:** THE REVEALER of God and his kingdom—*The Steward* of the full and final movement from divine intention to creation to telos!

- The in-breaking of the reign of God was his whole message and method, etc. God is initiating something—people must respond now and repent; be converted!
- The reactions to Jesus show that he was both clear and compelling:
  - Internally in Israel (Zealots, Qumran, Herodian)
    - **Mk 7 (MSG):** You have a fine way of rejecting the commandment of God in order to establish your tradition!
  - Political powers
  - The demonic
- We then, through our spiritual transformation, lead ourselves and our churches in alignment with these aims—repentance and “continuing conversion” (Guder)

**Our work over the next five years:** given the Gospel  
According to Jesus:

- What does it mean to be *lost*?
- What does this mean for the vision and practice of evangelism?
- For discipleship and formation?
- For missional ecclesiology?
- Pastoral leadership?
- For pneumatology?
- Culture engagement?

**Concluding thoughts:** (Volf) no church without the reign of God; no reign of God without the church...

The Gospel is not merely a message to be proclaimed, it is the form of our participation in what God is doing in and through the world.

The Kingdom—the expressed action of God—is our highest priority. Misunderstanding this has been the cause of innumerable trouble and failure in the church:

**Matthew 5:** You're kingdom subjects. Now *live* like it. *Live* out your God-created identity. *Live* generously and graciously toward others, the way God lives toward you.