

Matthew 4:19-22 (NRSV)

As he walked by the Sea of Galilee, he saw two brothers, Simon, who is called Peter, and Andrew his brother, casting a net into the lake—for they were fishermen. ¹⁹And he said to them, ‘Follow me, and I will make you fish for people.’ ²⁰Immediately they left their nets and followed him. ²¹As he went from there, he saw two other brothers, James son of Zebedee and his brother John, in the boat with their father Zebedee, mending their nets, and he called them. ²²Immediately they left the boat and their father, and followed him.

Matthew 9:35-38 (NRSV)

³⁵Then Jesus went about all the cities and villages, teaching in their synagogues, and proclaiming the good news of the kingdom, and curing every disease and every sickness. ³⁶When he saw the crowds, he had compassion for them, because they were harassed and helpless, like sheep without a shepherd. ³⁷Then he said to his disciples, “The harvest is plentiful, but the laborers are few; ³⁸therefore ask the Lord of the harvest to send out laborers into his harvest.”

John 17:1-4

After Jesus had spoken these words, he looked up to heaven and said, ‘Father, the hour has come; glorify your Son so that the Son may glorify you, ²since you have given him authority over all people, to give eternal life to all whom you have given him. ³And this is eternal life, that they may know you, the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom you have sent. ⁴I glorified you on earth by finishing the work that you gave me to do.

Jesus led with his hands not just his words. He lived out the reality of the kingdom of God. Do we lead with our hands? Do we lead like Jesus?¹

People are surprised when they find out that I recommend against using a red-letter Bible, in which Jesus’ words, and nothing else, are in red. It’s not that I’m against Jesus’ teachings; the problem is that a red-letter Bible makes it seem that what Jesus did was less important than what he said. Yet, we know from our own experiences that what we do often reveals more about who we are than what we say. Even our children know that the ole’ “Do as I say, not as I do” doesn’t really cut it. Jesus had the wisdom to both say it and do it.

And what did Jesus do? He traveled and he taught and he proclaimed the arrival of the kingdom of God and he invited and he welcomed . . . and he healed. All of this was focused on Jesus’ astonishing claim that in him, the long-awaited dawning of God’s kingdom had arrived. As Jesus puts it in the opening of Mark’s gospel, “The time is fulfilled, the kingdom of God is at hand; repent and believe in the good news” (1:15).

It is pretty easy for us to grasp that Jesus taught about the kingdom of God. Many of Jesus’ parables begin with the phrase, “The kingdom of God² is like this . . .” The Sermon of the Mount is an extended teaching of what the kingdom of God is like. But what about Jesus’ actions? His dining with tax collectors and prostitutes. His healing of the lame and the blind and the sick. Yes, these were acts of compassion, but they were far more: they were enactments of the kingdom of God. Not just mini-dramas to make a point, but the genuine bursting forth of God’s kingdom.

Consider Jesus’ announcement of his ministry in Luke 4. Jesus rises to speak in the Nazareth synagogue and reads from the scroll of Isaiah: “The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because he has appointed me to bring good news to the poor. He has sent me to proclaim release to the captives and recovery of sight to the blind, to let the oppressed go free, to proclaim the year of the Lord’s favor.”

When Jesus fed the poor, healed the sick, made the blind see and the rest, he was showing people that God’s kingdom had arrived, for in God’s kingdom there is no hunger and no

¹This series is based upon the Blanchard & Hodges book, *Lead Like Jesus*.

²Being sensitive to some Jews’ refusal even to say the word “God,” Matthew uses “kingdom of heaven” rather than “kingdom of God,” but they mean the same thing.

sickness and no blindness. Again, these were not merely live-action parables. It was more like Jesus was opening a portal³ into the kingdom of God when he cured each sick person.

The reality of God's kingdom and its arrival 2,000 years ago is what makes Christian mission work different than it appears to some. Whether it is feeding the hungry, providing malaria nets, or proclaiming the Good News, all these are also enactments of God's kingdom, portals into a world without hunger, malaria, or ignorance.

A full belly may look like no more than a full belly to some – but there is far more going on. It is a bit like seeing a Bible sitting on a table. For many, the Bible is no more than a marginally interesting collection of ancient writings. But, in truth, the Bible is much more than that. It is the “God-breathed” revelation of God's self. It is the God-given testimony to Jesus Christ, the living Word of God. As the cliché goes, there is more to the Bible than meets the eye. And there is more to each act of compassion.

Lesslie Newbigin

“Who?,” you're probably asking yourself. Yet Lesslie Newbigin was arguably the most influential missionary theologian of the late twentieth-century.

After finishing his Oxford studies for ordination, Newbigin and his wife, Helen, set sail for India where they would serve in the mission field for the next 35 years. After his so-called retirement, Bishop Newbigin provided leadership to mission agencies and efforts around the globe, though his most lasting influence has been in Europe and America, which Newbigin came to see as mission fields in themselves. Tim Stafford writes:

“Ministry in England, he discovered, ‘is much harder than anything I met in India. There is a cold contempt for the Gospel which is harder to face than opposition. ... England is a pagan society and the development of a truly missionary encounter with this very tough form of paganism is the greatest intellectual and practical task facing the Church’ (*Unfinished Agenda*).

From that rude confrontation with pagan England has come an outpouring of books and lectures. Newbigin looked at the West with a missionary's eye and asked a missionary's analytic questions. How can we evangelize this culture, built on Christian foundations yet utterly unwilling to consider (almost unable to understand) the Christian's claim to know the truth that will set us free? It is hard, Newbigin knew, for a Hindu or a Muslim to come to worship Christ. For an Englishman, it would seem, it had become even harder.”

Newbigin is always worth reading. Recently, Paul Weston pulled together an anthology of Bishop Newbigin's writings: *Lesslie Newbigin, Missionary Theologian: A reader*, Eerdmann's Publishing, 2006.

A leader's hands

As we saw last week, in the kingdom of God leaders serve. Each time we put the interests of others ahead of our own, each time we help those who need, each time we set aside our prideful ambition, we are building for the kingdom of God. This is not only what servant leaders say, it is what they do. It is what Jesus did. But how do we learn to be a serving leader? How do we set aside the world's conceptions of what it means to be a leader?

Blanchard and Hodges remind us that Jesus took his disciples from complete novices when he first called to them at the seaside to teachers and leaders in their own right, able with the help of God's Holy Spirit to build a church that endures to this day.

Likewise, we have to learn to be servant leaders. Each of us begins as a novice, or as Peter puts it, a newborn infant feeding on the pure, spiritual milk, so that we might grow into salvation (1 Peter 2:2). We learn to be trustworthy apprentices, eager for, as Paul puts it this time, “solid food,” (1 Corinthians 3:2). We strive to be maturing and ever-growing disciples of Jesus Christ.

But of course, God doesn't stop with us there. We are to be disciples with a purpose, modeling Christ with our heart, hands, head, and habits. In this sense, we are all missionaries. It is this outward focus that is so easy for us to forget. It is not just about helping out or doing good for others. It is about proclaiming the Good News in all that we say and do. Freeing the oppressed, healing the sick, feeding the poor . . . this is not just Jesus' work, it is our work too. And every moment spent doing such work is a moment lived in the kingdom of God.

³The kingdom of God is not merely a conception of our heads or hearts. It is real; every bit as real as the pavement you and I walk on each day. The best way to think about God's kingdom is as a parallel reality that will one day fully wash over our own. The coming of the kingdom is not about our going somewhere, it is about that somewhere being fully here. One of the things I like about the Harry Potter series is that it opens its readers to the possibility of two parallel realities, the world of wizards and the world of muggles, which somehow coexist in the same “space;” one world fully aware of the other, while one lives in near ignorance.

What is the church's mission?

What exactly is the church's mission in this world? Preaching the word? Making disciples? Feeding the poor? Regrettably, Christians have too often seen these as competing choices. But a better understanding of what Jesus meant by the kingdom of God would go a long way to leading us out of this particular trap. In a recent interview in *Christianity Today*, Bishop N. T. Wright was asked to talk about the church's mission:

"For generations the church has been polarized between those who see the main task being the saving of souls for heaven and the nurturing of those souls through the valley of this dark world, on the one hand, and on the other hand those who see the task of improving the lot of human beings and the world, rescuing the poor from their misery.

The longer that I've gone on as a New Testament scholar and wrestled with what the early Christians were actually talking about, the more it's been borne in on me that that distinction is one that we modern Westerners bring to the text rather than finding in the text. Because the great emphasis in the New Testament is that the gospel is not how to escape the world; the gospel is that the crucified and risen Jesus is the Lord of the world. And that his death and Resurrection transform the world, and that transformation can happen to you. You, in turn, can be part of the transforming work. That draws together what we traditionally called evangelism, bringing people to the point where they come to know God in Christ for themselves, with working for God's kingdom on earth as it is in heaven. That has always been at the heart of the Lord's Prayer, and how we've managed for years to say the Lord's Prayer without realizing that Jesus really meant it is very curious. Our Western culture since the 18th century has made a virtue of separating out religion from real life, or faith from politics. When I lecture about this, people will pop up and say, 'Surely Jesus said my kingdom is not of this world.' And the answer is no, what Jesus said in John 18 is, "My kingdom is not from this world." That's *ek tou kosmoutoutou*. It's quite clear in the text that Jesus' kingdom doesn't start with this world. It isn't a worldly kingdom, but it is for this world. It's from somewhere else, but it's for this world.

The key to mission is always worship. You can only be reflecting the love of God into the world if you are worshiping the true God who creates the world out of overflowing self-giving love. The more you look at that God and celebrate that love, the more you have to be reflecting that overflowing self-giving love into the world."

READING WITH HEART & MIND, AUGUST 19 - 25

Sunday, Deuteronomy 9 This book is filled with blessings and curses. We're fine with the blessings, but what do you make of the curses, the consequences of failing to live up to the promises that make up the covenant? In this chapter, what are the consequences to Israel of rebelling against God.

Monday, Deuteronomy 10:12-22 What is the essence of the Old Testament Law? How might these verses help us to make sense of Jesus' statement that he came to fulfill the Law, not abolish it?

Tuesday, Deuteronomy 11 Chapter 9 was about the consequences of rebellion against God. Here, the focus is on the rewards of obedience. How would you summarize these rewards? What do you think these two chapters mean to us and to our practice of our faith?

Wednesday, Deuteronomy 12:1-28 It is easy to blow through chapters like this one. But stop to consider why there are so many warnings about pagan shrines and pagan worship. Why do you think this was so important to the covenant? What does it mean for us today?

Thursday, Deuteronomy 14:3-29 What could possibly be God's theological instruction in verses 3-21? What might God be teaching them? Us? Verses 22-29 are about tithing. How would you summarize these? What do they say about our own giving?

Friday, Deuteronomy 15:1-18 This is another important OT concept and practice. How does the sabbatical year work? How could we live this out in our modern world? What does this have to do with social justice?

Saturday, Deuteronomy 15:19 – 16:17 Christians don't tend to know much about the Jewish calendar of festivals, but we should. They are important to a better reading of the New Testament. You can learn more about the festivals from a good Bible dictionary.

Sermon Notes

www.thebibleacademy.com

Registration for the Fall 2007 Bible Academy session is now open at our new website address. We are offering daytime and evening classes as well as two one-day Saturday workshops. There is something for everyone this fall and we hope that you'll make plans now to be a part of it. Classes will begin the week of September 24. Brochures for the fall session are available around the church and will be mailed to homes soon.

Scott Engle's class, *Something More*, meets in Wesley Hall at 9:30 every Sunday.

If you are not a part of a Sunday morning class, we hope that you'll visit our class. It is open to adults of all ages. Whether you are new to St. Andrew or just visiting, the class is a great way to begin getting connected. If you have questions, you are welcome to call Scott at 214-291-8009 or e-mail him at sengle@standrewacademy.org.

Questions for Discussion and Reflection

1. You might begin by talking about the nature of the kingdom of God. What do you mean when you use the phrase "kingdom of God?" What are some other meanings you've heard expressed? How could you make the kingdom of God more real to your own life and faith? You might re-read Bishop Wright's comments in the p. 3 textbox and reflect on them. Because Jesus speaks more about the kingdom of God than anything else, coming to a deeper and richer understanding of what he means is crucial.
2. Why is it so difficult for our "doing" to conform to our "saying?" How could we do a better job of living out our beliefs? What are a few immediate, concrete steps, regardless of how small, you could take this week to be a more Christlike "doer?"
3. In *Lead Like Jesus*, Blanchard & Hodges suggest that "coaching is the most important servant leadership element in helping people to accomplish their goals." Do you agree? Have you ever coached someone to help them achieve their goals? In a family situation? Among friends? I'm sure that someone has asked for your coaching/advice. What have you learned about coaching someone who comes to you? How could you better model Jesus when someone does?
4. Blanchard & Hodges ask us to think about some occasions when we needed coaching:
 - "Think of a time when you were an untrained novice just starting out to learn a new task or role. What did you need most from someone else to help you get started? Did you get it? If not, what was the result?"
 - "Think of a time when you needed someone to push you beyond a failure or an easy early success to get to a higher level of understanding and performance in a new task. Think of a time when you quit because nobody was there to take you to the new level." What did you learn from these experiences that could help you learn to lead like Jesus?