

Mike Slaughter

*with Karen Perry Smith*

# REVOLUTIONARY KINGDOM

*Following the Rebel Jesus*





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# CHAPTER 1

## THE GOSPEL OF THE KINGDOM OF GOD

*[Jesus said,] “Now is the time! Here comes God’s kingdom!  
Change your hearts and lives, and trust this good news!”*

*Mark 1:15*

**M**y initial encounter with Jesus during my late teen years was deeply personal. Raised in the church, baptized as an infant, and confirmed in the sixth grade, my understanding of the Christian faith up to that point had been strictly historical. I knew nothing about a personal encounter with the risen, living Christ.

The Jesus movement of the late sixties and early seventies was in full swing. I immersed myself in a Campus Christian Fellowship group at the University of Cincinnati. We met in dorm rooms and student apartments learning about living life together in communities like the one described in Acts 2. Our community’s practices paralleled those of the rabbi Jesus’ first-century followers: “The believers devoted themselves to the apostles’ teaching, to the community, to their shared meals, and to their prayers” (Acts 2:42). We understood the gospel mandate of the Kingdom meant being heavenly minded, and it necessitated working for earthly good. We participated in planning the first Earth Day (April 22, 1970) to demonstrate support for environmental protection.

Viewing the Vietnam War from a gospel perspective and working together aggressively for civil rights went hand in hand with Bible

study and prayer. As Jesus' followers, we saw ourselves representing an alternative politic, the politic of God's kingdom that supersedes all the politics of all the world's kingdoms. We could not separate witnessing and handing out gospel pamphlets from bringing good news to the poor and setting captives free (see Luke 4:18). Jesus gave me a new vision for the teenagers in my hometown community. I taught the very principles and practices I was learning in my college discipleship group to a racially diverse group of high school students back home. "Pass it on" was and is the mantra of discipleship.

Through almost five decades of ministry, I have observed the heresy of privatized faith corrupt Jesus' gospel of the kingdom of God. As I wrote in the first book in this series, *Renegade Gospel*: "When we privatize our faith, we cease to be salt and light in the world. No longer part of a countercultural revolution, or an outpost of heaven demonstrating God's plan for restoration and resurrection, we reduce our faith to this: "Jesus came, died, and rose from the grave to get me into heaven." No! We don't pray to get into heaven; we actively pray and work to get the kingdom of heaven into earth."<sup>1</sup>

A large number of Christians today have confused the gospel of the Kingdom with the politics of the nation-state and have embraced worldly political leaders as ultimate heralds of truth. One influential Christian, Jerry Falwell Jr., who leads the largest Christian university in the US, when asked recently. "Is there anything President Trump could do that would endanger . . . support from you?" answered, "No."<sup>2</sup> The word of God reminds us to restrain ourselves from idolizing worldly leaders:

*Don't trust leaders;  
don't trust and human beings—  
there's no saving help with them!  
Their breath leaves them,  
then they go back to the ground.  
On that very same day, their plans die too.*  
(Psalm 146:3-4)

Jesus' first-century followers lived in prophetic tension with the politics of state. The Book of Acts describes how some of the early

church's opponents in Thessalonica turned the church's faithfulness to God into a political accusation: "These people who have been disturbing the peace throughout the empire have also come here.... Every one of them does what is contrary to Caesar's decrees by naming someone else as king: Jesus" (Acts 17:6-7).

Jesus' gospel is the good news about the arrival of God's earthly reign. The four Gospels mention this gospel of the "kingdom of God" or "kingdom of heaven" (the phrases are interchangeable) 126 times.

## JESUS' GOSPEL OF THE KINGDOM OF GOD

*Jesus called the Twelve together and he gave them power and authority over all demons and to heal sicknesses. He sent them out to proclaim God's kingdom and to heal the sick.*

*(Luke 9:1-2)*

Jesus framed his understanding of the gospel of "the kingdom of God" within the context of ancient Jewish messianic expectation.

Centuries before Jesus' earthly mission, many in the Jewish community had looked forward to the time when God's reign would be established on earth through a coming messiah. The prophet Zechariah, for example, shared this expectation:

*Rejoice and be glad, Daughter Zion,  
because I am about to come and will dwell among you,  
says the LORD.  
Many nations will be joined to the LORD on that day.  
They will become my people,  
and I will dwell among you  
so you will know that the LORD of heavenly forces sent  
me to you.*

*(Zechariah 2:10-11)*

For some Christians, the hope is not for heaven but rather a time when God returns to reign on earth. Psalm 96 reads,

*Let the heavens rejoice, let the earth be glad;  
let the sea resound, and all that is in it.  
Let the fields be jubilant, and everything in them;  
let all the trees of the forest sing for joy.*



*Let all creation rejoice before the LORD, for he comes,  
he comes to judge the earth.  
He will judge the world in righteousness  
and the peoples in his faithfulness.*

*(Psalm 96:11-13 NIV)*

For many ancient Israelites, judgment had a positive connotation. It meant God was going to bring justice for the oppressed. God was going to set the captive free and lift up the downtrodden.<sup>3</sup>

The world's neglected poor will be first and its self-focused oppressors will be last. Polluted waters will be made fresh. Encroaching deserts will blossom into flowering forests. The psalmist and other ancient Israelites believed the Messiah would come not to take people to heaven but to establish heaven's rule on earth.

The Messiah's coming would mark the beginning of the full restoration of God's created order. In Revelation, the author describes the fullness of creation's restoration at the end of this age:

*"Look! God's dwelling is here with humankind. He will dwell with them, and they will be his peoples. God himself will be with them as their God. He will wipe away every tear from their eyes. Death will be no more. There will be no mourning, crying, or pain anymore, for the former things have passed away." Then the one seated on the throne said, "Look! I'm making all things new."*

*(Revelation 21:3-5)*

Eden will be fully restored including the healing of the wounded planet. Water will be made clean and the earth will bear abundant fruit (22:1-2).

Jesus taught his disciples to pray, "your kingdom come, / your will be done, / on earth as it is in heaven" (Matthew 6:10 NIV). When we pray the Lord's Prayer, we are affirming the invasion of heaven's revolutionary rule has begun through Jesus' life, death, and resurrection. Easter is more than remembering that Jesus was raised from the dead. Easter celebrates what Jesus' resurrection has begun: the transformation of all creation.

Christians sometimes believe God will eventually destroy the earth at the end of this age. Absolutely not! Genesis makes clear "God

saw everything he had made: it was supremely good” (Genesis 1:31). God’s judgment is not to destroy but to fully redeem and restore all of creation. At the end of this age, the world and all it contains will be “firmly in place” (1 Chronicles 16:30).

God revealed through ancient Israel’s prophets that a messiah King would come from Judah, one of Israel’s twelve tribes (Isaiah 11:1-5). Isaiah paints a picture of the Kingdom’s ultimate fulfillment:

*The wolf will live with the lamb,  
and the leopard will lie down with the young goat;  
the calf and the young lion will feed together,  
and a little child will lead them.*

*The cow and the bear will graze.  
Their young will lie down together,  
and a lion will eat straw like an ox.*

*A nursing child will play over the snake’s hole;  
toddlers will reach over the serpent’s den.*

*They won’t harm or destroy anywhere on my holy  
mountain.*

*The earth will be filled with the knowledge of the LORD,  
just as the water covers the sea.*

*On that day, the root of Jesse will stand as a signal to the  
peoples. The nations will seek him out, and his dwelling will  
be glorious.*

*(Isaiah 11:6-10)*

Louis Evely had this insightful word:

To believe in God is to believe in the salvation of the world. The paradox of our time is that those who believe in God do not believe in the salvation of the world, and those who believe in the future of the world do not believe in God.

Christians believe in the “end of the world,” they expect final catastrophe, the punishment of others. Atheists in their turn invent doctrines of salvation, try to give meaning to life, work, the future of humankind, and refuse to believe in God because Christians believe in him and take no interest in the world. All ignore the true God: he who has so loved the world!



But which is the more culpable of ignorance?  
To love God is to love the world. To love God passionately  
is to love the world passionately. To hope in God is to hope  
for the salvation of the world.<sup>4</sup>

Jesus boldly proclaimed his fulfillment of the messianic expectation when he read from the scroll of the prophet Isaiah in the synagogue in Nazareth:

The Spirit of the Lord is upon me,  
because the Lord has anointed me.  
He has sent me to preach good news to the poor,  
to proclaim release to the prisoners  
and recovery of sight to the blind,  
to liberate the oppressed,  
and to proclaim the year of the Lord's favor.

*(Luke 4:18-19)*

Jesus was, in effect, saying, "The Kingdom revolution of God's redemptive work has established a beachhead on planet Earth, and I am the long-awaited anointed rebel leader of heaven's movement."

When some Pharisees asked Jesus when the kingdom of God would come, Jesus replied, "God's kingdom isn't coming with signs that are easily noticed. Nor will people say, 'Look, here it is!' or 'There it is!' Don't you see? God's kingdom is already among you." (Luke 17:20-21). The kingdom of God is both present now and to come in the future. Heaven's redemptive movement began on the very first Christmas. We look forward to the day of the Lord's return when all of heaven's order will be restored.

## A PERSONAL AND SOCIAL GOSPEL

The gospel of the Kingdom has two dynamics. It is both personal and social. John Wesley, founder of the Methodist movement, reminded the church it is impossible to have personal holiness apart from social holiness, or social holiness apart from personal holiness.

Jesus' gospel makes no pretense of dying and going to a disembodied heaven somewhere beyond creation's galaxies. Jesus announced the holistic restoration of heaven's reign on earth. He

saw his mission in the context of the Old Testament prophets' social justice demands and the fulfillment of messianic prophecies. The prophet Amos decries institutional worship over God's demand for justice:

*I hate, I reject your festivals;  
I don't enjoy your joyous assemblies.  
If you bring me your entirely burned offerings and gifts  
of food—  
I won't be pleased.  
I won't even look at your offerings of well-fed animals.  
Take away the noise of your songs;  
I won't listen to the melody of your harps.  
But let justice roll down like waters  
and righteousness like an ever-flowing stream.*  
(Amos 5:21-24)

Kingdom justice is not up for partisan political debate. All who become part of Jesus' movement will be working together in community to change oppressive systems that fail to honor the least and the lost. The word of God is definitive:

*Because you crush the weak,  
and because you tax their grain,  
you have built houses of carved stone,  
but you won't live in them;  
you have planted pleasant vineyards,  
but you won't drink their wine.*  
(Amos 5:11)

There has been a growing disparity between the rich and the poor and a loss of the middle class in the US. This widening gap impacts education, health care, housing and employment opportunities. (We will explore wealth gap more in chapter 5, "Kingdom Economy.")

In a column in *The New York Times*, David Brooks wrote: "Housing and construction rules that keep the poor and less educated away from places with good schools and good job opportunities . . . have a devastating effect on economic growth nationwide."<sup>5</sup> How should we, as followers of Jesus, address this widening gulf between the haves and the have-nots? We cannot cop out by claiming Jesus was

only concerned with saving souls and not changing unjust social structures. Followers of Jesus must address issues of economic inequality and unjust political policies.

God holds both individuals and nations accountable for upholding justice for all persons. Take a moment to consider what God has directed through the Holy Scripture:

*When immigrants live in your land, you must not cheat them. Any immigrant who lives with you must be treated as if they were one of your citizens. You must love them as yourself, because you were immigrants in the land of Egypt; I am the LORD your God.*

*(Leviticus 19:33-34)*

*“Cursed is anyone who obstructs the legal rights of immigrants, orphans, or widows.”*

*(Deuteronomy 27:19)*

*[God] has told you, human one, what is good and what the LORD requires from you:*

*to do justice, embrace faithful love, and walk humbly with your God.*

*(Micah 6:8)*

*Hear this, you who trample on the needy and destroy the poor of the land, saying,*

*“When will the new moon be over that we may sell grain, and the Sabbath so that we may offer wheat for sale, make the ephah smaller, enlarge the shekel, and deceive with false balances, in order to buy the needy for silver and the helpless for sandals, and sell garbage as grain?”*

*(Amos 8:4-6)*

*Learn to do good.*

*Seek justice:*

*help the oppressed;  
defend the orphan;*

*The Gospel of the Kingdom of God*

*plead for the widow.  
(Isaiah 1:17)*

*The LORD of heavenly forces proclaims:*

*Make just and faithful decisions; show kindness and  
compassion to each other!*

*(Zechariah 7:9)*

*Pursue righteousness so that you may live long and take  
possession of the land that the LORD your God is giving you.*

*(Deuteronomy 16:20)*

*The righteous know the rights of the poor,  
but the wicked don't understand.*

*(Proverbs 29:7)*

Texts like these formed Jesus' understanding of his Kingdom mission of social redemption.

Isaiah's prophecies address the misconceptions God's people have when they divorce personal spirituality from social responsibility. Eighth-century Hebrews made the same mistakes many fans of Jesus make today. (Yes, I said "fans" of Jesus, not followers. Jesus said, "Follow me" eighty-seven times in the four Gospels. He said, "Worship me" only twice. We need more followers of Jesus and fewer fans!)

*"Why do we fast and you don't see;  
why afflict ourselves and you don't notice?"  
Yet on your fast day you do whatever you want,  
and oppress all your workers.*

*(Isaiah 58:3)*

As followers of the Rebel Jesus, we must work for just minimum wages and health care for all people. Why? Because God has made it clear these are Kingdom priorities. Minimum wage increases have not kept up with higher wage income growth or inflation in the US. A worker paid the federal minimum wage in 2017 could only earn \$15,080 working full time.<sup>6</sup> Jesus has given his people the mandate to promote health and healing for all people: "he gave them power

and authority over all demons and to heal sicknesses . . . to proclaim God's kingdom and to heal the sick" (Luke 9:1-2). Demonic powers are the resistant systems, structures, and principalities that stand in the way of God's restorative order.

God's people cannot practice personal, spiritual acts of piety apart from social engagement. Through the prophet Isaiah, God criticized exactly that kind of divide and called the people to a life that integrated personal spirituality and social justice:

*Is this the kind of fast I choose,  
a day of self-affliction,  
of bending one's head like a reed  
and of lying down in mourning clothing and ashes?  
Is this what you call a fast,  
a day acceptable to the LORD?*

*Isn't this the fast I choose:  
releasing wicked restraints, untying the ropes of a yoke,  
setting free the mistreated,  
and breaking every yoke?*

*Isn't it sharing your bread with the hungry  
and bringing the homeless poor into your house,  
covering the naked when you see them,  
and not hiding from your own family? . . .  
If you open your heart to the hungry,  
and provide abundantly for those who are afflicted,  
your light will shine in the darkness,  
and your gloom will be like the noon.*

*(Isaiah 58:5-7, 10)*

## THE STATE OF THE CHURCH

I am currently serving in my forty-seventh year of active ministry. I served forty-five of those years in local churches. At the end of 2017, I turned leadership of Ginghamburg Church, where I had served for more than thirty-eight years, over to other people so I could devote my full time to working with the next generation of church leaders. Since I no longer have the responsibility of leading worship on a weekly basis, I am discovering I have to be very intentional in maintaining the discipline of weekly corporate

worship. I'm experiencing firsthand why so many church people disengage from current expressions of the institutional church.

I'm also battling my own cynicism about the church at the same time, and that's not helping me any. We who are the US church can be so unlike Jesus. We so often parrot the divisive pundits who plague our country's partisan politics, and we do it more passionately than we demonstrate the radical politics of God's kingdom, alternative politics that tear down the barriers that divide us. We continue to water down Jesus' radical call to follow him in obedience and self-abandonment. We attempt to domesticate and contain the Holy Spirit in an institutional box we call "church"—a box Jesus has never allowed to contain him.

The institutional church is not the kingdom of God, and neither are we who are its members. But we *are* called to be agents of the Kingdom we can so easily fail to represent.

Let me tell you about one example of how the church can still be agents of the Kingdom.

My daughter and son-in-law used to live in a racially and socio-economically diverse Boston neighborhood. A United Methodist church down the block from their home had, like many in urban areas, experienced several decades of decline. Its congregation of fewer than fifty elderly folks were trying to keep the lights on. A nonprofit organization rented the church basement for \$1,000 a month for the purpose of running a 7-day-per-week, 365-days-a-year soup kitchen. They used the room next to the well-worn fellowship hall to distribute clothes. Various volunteer groups brought in food to serve the eighty to one hundred brothers and sisters living in poverty who showed up each evening.

On one night when I visited that church, a young adult group from a nearby Roman Catholic congregation brought and served the food. Now, I don't know how you best connect to Jesus and the reality of his resurrection presence, but I seem to see him best when I hang with those Jesus called "the least of these brothers and sisters of mine" (Matthew 25:40). Hanging out in the humid, 142-year-old basement of a congregation mostly unaware of the mission happening there (apart from the monthly rent payment) gave me the experience of breaking bread with some really special

people. Some were struggling in the death grip of addiction; others contended with the paralysis of mental illness. I sat with day workers who would stand in a parking lot waiting for anyone to come and offer them odd jobs. I sat with these precious people and wondered what could happen in our dying congregations if the handful of people sitting in the sanctuary on Sunday mornings would move downstairs the other six days of the week. What can happen when fans commit themselves to becoming followers? What can happen if we dare not just to believe in Jesus, but to *follow* him?

Monika Hellwig was a Roman Catholic theologian at Georgetown University. Her words remind us God's Spirit cannot be tamed: "In my journey... as a Catholic scholar, what have I really learned? First of all, that we cannot keep the Holy Spirit out of the church, no matter how much we try to domesticate the whole enterprise. Second, that the church is wiser and more faithful when it listens discerningly to many voices, even those from outside its own boundaries."<sup>7</sup>

True conversion brings a commitment of social responsibility to work toward closing the divide between the rich and the poor. When the crushing crowds, energized by Jesus' cousin John's message, came out to be baptized, John reminded them what true repentance really means: "Produce fruit that shows you have changed your hearts and lives. . . . Whoever has two shirts must share with the one who has none, and whoever has food must do the same." To the tax collectors who came to be baptized, John said; "Collect no more than you are authorized to collect." To the soldiers who came with the crowd; "Don't cheat or harass anyone, and be content with your pay" (Luke 3:8, 11, 13-14).

Jesus' encounter with the wealthy tax collector Zacchaeus, who he met in Jericho, gives us better insight into the restorative justice understanding first-century followers knew went with conversion. In the assembly of other sinners dining with Jesus, Zacchaeus stood up from the table and said: "Look, Lord, I give half of my possessions to the poor. And if I have cheated anyone, I repay them four times as much" (Luke 19:8). Jesus' response gives us a clearer understanding of the holistic meaning of salvation: "Today salvation has come to this household because he too is a son of Abraham. The Human One came to seek and save the lost" (Luke 19:9-10).



Jesus' mission statement that he read from Isaiah's scroll in his hometown synagogue made the restoration of justice a Kingdom priority:

The Spirit of the Lord is upon me,  
because the Lord has anointed me.  
He has sent me to preach good news to the poor,  
to proclaim release to the prisoners  
and recovery of sight to the blind,  
to liberate the oppressed,  
and to proclaim the year of the Lord's favor.  
*(Luke 4:18-19)*

My sisters and brothers, if the gospel is not good news for the poor it is not the gospel of Jesus!

*He has sent me . . .  
to bind up the brokenhearted,  
to proclaim release for the captives,  
and liberation for prisoners,  
to proclaim the year of the LORD's favor  
and a day of vindication for our God,  
to comfort all who mourn,  
to provide for Zion's mourners,  
to give them a crown in place of ashes,  
oil of joy in place of mourning,  
a mantle of praise in place of discouragement.  
(Isaiah 61:1-3)*

This is what the gospel of Jesus we say "yes" to in answering his call to follow him is like. We will become fully committed to join his community to

*rebuild the ancient ruins,  
[to] restore formerly deserted places;  
[to] renew ruined cities,  
places deserted in generations past.  
(Isaiah 61:4)*

Why? For "I, the LORD, love justice: / I hate robbery and dishonesty" (v. 8).

Jesus' long discourse concerning the final day of judgment

amplifies this Kingdom mandate. He tells his disciples about his coming return with the angels of heaven:

*“Then the king will say to those on his right, ‘Come, you who will receive good things from my Father. Inherit the kingdom that was prepared for you before the world began. I was hungry and you gave me food to eat. I was thirsty and you gave me a drink. I was a stranger and you welcomed me. I was naked and you gave me clothes to wear. I was sick and you took care of me. I was in prison and you visited me.’...*

*“I assure you that when you have done it for one of the least of these brothers and sisters of mine, you have done it for me.”*

*(Matthew 25:34-36, 40)*

Clarence Jordan, who earned a doctorate in New Testament studies from Southern Baptist Seminary in Louisville, founded Koinonia Farm near Americus, Georgia, in 1942. He designed the farm as an experiment in communal Christian living. He saw racial reconciliation between blacks and whites as the rural South’s greatest need—a view considered dangerously radical at the time in the community where he ministered. After the Supreme Court’s decision in *Brown v. Board of Education* (1954) began school desegregation, Koinonia was subjected to violent terrorist attacks and an economic boycott. Jordan believed “the problems with Christianity stemmed from the fact that most Christians pictured Jesus enthroned in heaven or safely confined to ‘Bible Times,’ thus missing the challenge of the incarnation.” By glorifying Christ, he wrote, “We more effectively rid ourselves of him than did those who crucified him.” He also stated, “Faith is not belief in spite of evidence but a life in scorn of the consequences.”<sup>8</sup>

Some of you at this point might be feeling the pinch of political undertones. The gospel of the Kingdom demands Christian engagement in the political systems of the world. We must hold the political principalities and powers accountable for ensuring full justice and working for the well-being of all God’s children. Albert Mohler, the president of Southern Seminary and Boyce College, said, “I truly believe that we’re called to be involved in

every arena of life, but never simply on the terms set by any given human endeavor. . . . So, Christians will, of necessity, if faithful, be politically engaged. But that doesn't always mean that we operate with a political strategy or that we are understood to have any hope of being on the winning side. We have a greater requirement for faithfulness."<sup>9</sup>

Our political involvement must never compromise the gospel's revolutionary demands by being identified with a worldly partisan political party. Jesus' statement that his Kingdom was not of this world (John 18:36) did not mean it was distant and otherworldly. Jesus' kingdom stands in prophetic tension with all political partisan platforms, conservative or progressive, as well as the self-serving religious institutions. Why was he crucified? He was considered an enemy by both during his time on earth.

Now here is the hard part in this equation. Jesus warned those who would dare follow him:

*"If the world hates you, know that it hated me first. If you belonged to the world, the world would love you as its own. However, I have chosen you out of the world, and you don't belong to the world. This is why the world hates you. Remember what I told you, 'Servants aren't greater than their master.' If the world harassed me, it will harass you too."*  
(John 15:18-20)

Archbishop Oscar Romero of San Salvador spoke boldly against the oppressive government regime stealing farmland from the poor and silencing protesters through murder. Romero openly criticized the US government for backing the military junta that seized control of the national government in 1979. While celebrating mass on March 24, 1980, in the chapel of the Hospital of Divine Providence, he was assassinated at the altar, at the age of sixty-two.<sup>10</sup>

Romero reminds us the church cannot stand silent in the face of social injustice. "A church that does not provoke crisis, a gospel that does not disturb, a word of God that does not rankle, a word of God that does not touch the concrete sin of the society in which it is being proclaimed—what kind of gospel is that?"<sup>11</sup>

Romero defined the great need for today's church:

The great need today is for Christians who are active and critical, who don't accept situations without analyzing them inwardly and deeply. We no longer want masses of people like those who have been trifled with for so long. We want persons like fruitful fig trees, who can say yes to justice and no to injustice and can make use of the precious gift of life, despite of the circumstances.<sup>12</sup>

## MISPLACED ALLEGIANCE—THE FLAG OR THE CROSS?

We are experiencing a growing tide of nationalism and with it a spirit of isolationism throughout our world. In our own country, a nationalistic zeal is promoting the attitude of “country first, country forever.” Our borders start to become sacrosanct and “outsiders” become suspicious, something to be feared. The Syrian conflict that began in March 2011 has created one of the worst humanitarian crises in recent times. More than 13 million people in the country need humanitarian assistance, and more than 5.6 million Syrians have fled the country as refugees. Another 6.2 million people are displaced within Syria.<sup>13</sup> European countries have made moves to close borders and make immigration more restrictive. In June 2016, Britain voted to leave the European Union. Debate about building walls and making immigration much more restrictive dominated the 2016 US presidential election.

As of this writing, a caravan of thousands of Central American migrants is trekking through Mexico. It is made up of weary families seeking asylum in the United States. I am not so naïve as to believe there are not folks in this group who have criminal intentions. But I also know there are families seeking asylum for protection from the drug cartels threatening the lives of their children.

What does the Bible have to say about our response to these human needs? What does it mean to face these tough issues with a kingdom-of-God worldview? Why does nationalism contradict God's restorative Kingdom movement?

Jesus' disciples were guilty of making the same assumption many Christians through the centuries have made. Even after his miraculous resurrection, they dared to ask him, “Lord, are you going to restore the kingdom to Israel now?” (Acts 1:6) They were

still looking for a political savior who would “make Israel great again.” Jesus’ response made it clear God’s new covenant movement no longer favored a particular people or individual nation. “It isn’t for you to know the times or seasons that the Father has set by his own authority. Rather you will receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you, and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, in all Judea and Samaria, and to the end of the earth” (Acts 1:7-8).

To the end of the earth! Yes, the Kingdom movement is about including all nations and all peoples. For God so loves the world! An early Christian creed, recited when believers were being baptized, affirmed this truth of radical inclusion: “There is neither Jew nor Greek; there is neither slave nor free; nor is there male and female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus” (Galatians 3:28).

Yes, God did choose Israel as a special people. They were not chosen, however, for privilege, but for God’s divine purpose. “Since the whole earth belongs to me[ you] will be a kingdom of priests for me and a holy nation” (Exodus 19:5-6). God had promised Abraham, “All the earth’s nations will be blessed because of [you]” (Genesis 18:18).

We must always see Jesus’ kingdom-of-God movement in prophetic tension with the empire-of-nation state. The gospel of the Rebel Jesus moves beyond nationalistic favoritism to global redemption.

The cross, not the flag, should be at the center of Christian identity and worship. As followers of the Rebel Jesus, we are a Kingdom people. The earliest Christian creed, “Jesus is Lord,” had lethal ramifications for those who accepted Jesus’ call to follow in the way of the cross. They refused to acknowledge Caesar as Lord. Yet so many in the church today have subjugated Christian faith to the gods of nationalistic allegiance.

A pastor recently shared an example of how she has had to confront this twisted heresy:

As a young female pastor in Mississippi, I had to choose carefully where to put my foot down. The folks in my newly appointed congregation said the pledge of allegiance during worship on Sunday mornings. They said the Lord’s Prayer,

the pledge of allegiance to the American flag and then the Christian flag, took the offering and sang the doxology. As for the pledges, I just stood silently every time. Every Sunday I moved the American flag a smidge closer to the door, with the intent of eventually getting it out of the sanctuary. After three years, someone noticed. That's when people also noticed I was not practicing the pledges, but just standing through them silently, which culminated in a three-hour-long meeting where they tried to convert me from Jesus-following to Christian nationalism.

They were completely convinced that you cannot separate loyalty to country (and the Republican party to be exact) from loyalty to Jesus.

It befuddles me when I see churches flying the Christian flag under the American flag. What does this say about Jesus' ultimate authority and our ultimate allegiance? Mike Jordan Laskey, former director of Life and Justice Ministries for the Diocese of Camden, addresses our contested loyalties: "Because Christians belong to a community that transcends national boundaries and politics, they should be wary of churches that hold nationalistic celebrations or sing patriotic songs and of church leaders who cozy up to political figures. American flags don't belong in church sanctuaries, where the focus should be on the crucified Christ, whom Christians worship and follow."<sup>14</sup>

The psalmist reminds us to "not put your trust in [political] princes, / in human beings, who cannot save" (Psalm 146:3 NIV). Why? Because we are children of God's kingdom who have but one ultimate allegiance. Jesus is Lord!

So how does the revolutionary kingdom of God differ from nationalism? Nationalism brings people together through pride of feeling and identity. "Our citizenship is in heaven. We look forward to a savior that comes from there—the Lord Jesus Christ" (Philippians 3:20). Followers of Jesus identify as citizens of the revolutionary kingdom of God, committed to following the way of the Rebel Jesus, serving his mission while we await his return. We are to be an alternative society governed by the Spirit of Christ.

## THE GOOD NEWS OF THE KINGDOM OF GOD IS HERE AND NOW

What exactly is a disciple, and how will we know if we have made one?

In *Revolutionary Kingdom: Following the Rebel Jesus*, author and pastor Mike Slaughter explores why we must exchange comfortable cultural worldviews and values for the radical requirements of living out the Kingdom of God on Planet Earth. When God's people get serious about this call, it's revolutionary. Jesus himself was the most radical revolutionary who ever lived and provided us a vision of a kingdom worth dying for.

Welcome to the revolution!

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In this book, we learn from Mike Slaughter that following the biblical Jesus will make us threats to the normative socio-economic system of our day. This book is a call to follow the radical Jesus, and in so doing, becoming revolutionaries in our own time.

—**Tony Campolo**, PhD, Professor Emeritus, Eastern University

I have been an enthusiastic follower and beneficiary of Mike Slaughter's work for decades. His most recent book, *Revolutionary Kingdom*, is my new favorite of all his excellent books. At a time when a big segment of American Christianity seems to be running off the rails, Mike stays right on track, focusing on what matters, moving full speed ahead in the life-giving way of the Rebel Jesus. This book will refuel your soul with the best kind of clean energy.

—**Brian D. McLaren**, author/activist

Mike Slaughter continues to lead the church in the footsteps of the Rebel Jesus. Mike holds nothing back in pushing us forward to live out our faith as Jesus did, with people and for people. This book challenged me and refocused me on what is really important. I needed it. You do too!

—**Jacob Armstrong**, Pastor, Providence Church, author of *Renovate, A New Playlist, God's Messy Family*, and *The New Adapters*

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**Also available:** *Revolutionary Kingdom: Leader Guide* and *Revolutionary Kingdom DVD*—featuring six engaging and lively discussions with the author and a video panel of Christian leaders.



**Mike Slaughter** is the Pastor Emeritus at Ginghamburg Church. Under his leadership, Ginghamburg Church has become known as an early innovator of small group ministry, the church “media reformation,” and cyber-ministry. Mike is the author of multiple books for church leaders, including *Down to Earth*, *The Passionate Church*, *Change the World*, *Dare to Dream*, *Renegade Gospel*, *A Different Kind of Christmas*, *Spiritual Entrepreneurs*, *Real Followers*, *Momentum for Life*, *UnLearning Church*, and *Upside Living in a Downside Economy*.

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