

“... a book worth reading, reflecting on, and... for use in group discussion.”

– Rev Dr Daniel Koh

Where is social justice in the Gospel? Where is social justice in the Singapore Church? These are the two main questions this book seeks to explore. Through the recount of the author’s journey of discovering social justice in the Bible, on the streets of Singapore, in the long history of the Singapore and global Church, a survey of local Christians and interviews with Christian justice-seekers and pastors, this book challenges the Singapore Church, as God’s Kingdom community, to reclaim biblical social justice as an integral facet of living the Gospel and manifesting God’s Kingdom.



About the Author



Ronald JJ Wong is a servant of King Jesus. As a lawyer, his legal practice is a form of tentmaking, ministry and a means to pursue social justice and *shalom*. His passion is to embody and advance the Gospel with works and words. His local church community is in Yio Chu Kang Chapel.



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THE
JUSTICE
DEMAND



RONALD
JJ WONG



GENESIS

THE JUSTICE DEMAND

SOCIAL JUSTICE & THE SINGAPORE CHURCH



“Deeply illuminating and challenging.”

Robert M Solomon

RONALD JJ WONG

Praise for *The Justice Demand*

Ronald Wong, a gifted young Christian thinker in Singapore, has written a remarkable book that is deeply illuminating and challenging. Ronald is relentless in his pursuit of biblical truth, passionate in his call to Christians and churches to live out the gospel with social responsibility, and well-versed with historical and current examples of Christian social justice ministries, especially in Singapore. *The Justice Demand's* pages are drenched with the grace and love of a holy God and urge us to reach out to those who suffer in the cold shadows of societies infected with the sinful habits of selfishness, greed and exploitation, and to engage in the public square on their behalf. This is a book that must be read by pastors, church leaders and those who seek to follow Christ faithfully, because there is more that can and should be done.

Bishop Emeritus Robert Solomon

Bishop Emeritus of the Methodist Church, Singapore

The Justice Demand is a journey that is as informative as it is introspective. Ronald Wong takes a good look at social justice in the Singaporean Church context, addressing it not only comprehensively and clearly—but also with a personal touch that gently moves readers to see the importance of social justice, as well as its integral place in the Gospel of Jesus Christ.

Rev Ezekiel Tan

General Secretary, The Bible Society of Singapore
Executive Director, ETHOS Institute for Public Christianity

The Justice Demand chronicles the journey of a passionate young man seeking to discover the source, motivation and purpose of social justice. Ronald studied the Bible, held interviews with practitioners and Christian leaders, conducted surveys among Christians and considered the laws of the land. With this wide range of research data, he reflected on contemporary issues relating to social justice. He clearly defined his understanding of social justice away from the social gospel. He considered the important partnership between social justice, evangelism and

discipleship. He also makes practical recommendations on how the church can get involved in community outreach. This is a textbook-worthy contribution about social justice to the Christian community at large.

Rick Toh

Lead Pastor, Yio Chu Kang Chapel

In Singapore, it is rare to find anyone preaching on weighty subjects like justice and righteousness, not to mention seeing someone, even one who is theologically trained, accepting the challenge of writing a book on such a subject. But every once in awhile, we have a courageous soul who decides that something should be said, and the church should be rallied to address social justice issues. I am pleased and encouraged by the effort of a young friend, Ronald JJ Wong, who has now written this comprehensive book that surveys biblical and theological teachings, deals with social problems, and argues for Christians to be more concerned about social justice. *The Justice Demand* is made richer with the inclusion of some interviews offering perspectives from Christians of diverse backgrounds. Ronald is a lawyer by training. Though not a graduate of any theological school, he is nonetheless well-read as the literature which he cited would attest. This is a book worth reading, reflecting on, and would be an excellent book for use in group discussion.

Rev Dr Daniel Koh Kah Soon

Chairperson, Methodist Welfare Services

Pastor, Christalite Methodist Chapel

Lecturer, Trinity Theological College

In *The Justice Demand*, Ronald puts forth a compelling argument for us contemporary Christians to fully engage with our hearts, souls and minds the entire spectrum of biblical social justice. And he does it elegantly with real stories woven into the fabric of biblical and academic scholarship, extending from a local Singaporean context into the global arena. Brilliant!

Dr Goh Wei-Leong

Chairman, HealthServe

Chairman, LinkingHands

The Justice Demand comes at a critical time for us. The demands for justice today are as great as ever, and the witness of the church demands that she respond. What I enjoy about the book is that the medium is as kaleidoscopic as its topic. At times it reads like an academic monograph with its intellectual rigour—that would satisfy those so inclined. But the reader will also find scattered throughout the book anecdotes from Ronald's personal local experiences and interviews with other local church leaders. It keeps the book grounded and contextually relevant for the Singaporean Christian.

It takes hard work to engage in understanding what justice fully means as God has revealed and mandated it. And with those answers to live out more faithfully what it means to be in the kingdom of God here and now. Reading *The Justice Demand* would be a good start. I would love to see this book spark many a thoughtful conversation in the local churches, and in gatherings of Christians in school and at work.

To the end that the gospel may be wholly lived out by the church in this generation, I heartily recommend *The Justice Demand*!

Ng Zhiwen

Ministry Staff Intern, Zion Bishan Bible-Presbyterian Church

The Justice Demand is a brilliant and unique interweaving of theology and firsthand narratives of justice and mercy from practitioners on the ground. Ronald Wong demonstrates both maturity of thought and maturity of writing in this book. The tome's "one big idea" is that the Singapore church as God's Kingdom community should reclaim biblical social justice as an integral facet of living the Gospel and manifesting God's Kingdom. This is an idea whose time has come. May we the body of Christ in Singapore hear and heed the author's clarion call.

Gregory Vijayendran

Chairman, Law Christian Fellowship

Honorary Secretary, Global Council, Advocates International

In *The Justice Demand*, Ronald provides a biblical-theological framework for a dimension of the Good News which is only beginning to find traction in Singapore churches. His thorough and thoughtful exploration of this under-emphasised facet of the Gospel provides timely fodder for Singapore churches to chew on.

The difficult subject he tries to surface for the church in Singapore is made so much more relatable by incorporating the voice and experience of key church leaders, thinkers and practitioners.

Dr Calvin Chong

Associate Professor in Educational Ministries,- Singapore Bible College
Council Member, Evangelical Fellowship of Singapore

As Christians celebrate the 500th year of the Protestant Reformation in 2017, we are reminded of the spirit of Martin Luther who gave a calm and reasoned plea for what is true and right, for which he will stand and not recant. I see in Ronald Wong a spirit of Luther. In his book *The Justice Demand*, he has provided a good account for his studied conviction on a Christian perspective of Justice based on a return to the original message of Christ, proclaiming the arrival of the Kingdom of God and its implications. Ronald perhaps represents the emerging generation of young leaders of our times which sees the signs of our times and are seeking to make things happen, one person at a time. We need to pay attention to this bold but necessary attempt by Ronald Wong to address the social responsibility demanded of the church in order to reveal the glorious gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ, our Saviour and King.

Lawrence Ko

National Director, Singapore Centre for Global Missions
Director, Asia Evangelical Alliance Mission Commission

THE
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CONTENTS

Acknowledgments	xvii
1. Stirrings of a Journey: Introduction	1
<i>The Gospel, Discipleship and Justice in God's School</i>	2
<i>Underdogs</i>	3
<i>The Big Picture</i>	5
<i>Who This Book is for and What it's About</i>	8
<i>Outline of This Book</i>	10
2. What's Social Justice Got to do with God's Story? The Gospel of the Kingdom Of God	15
A. <i>Jesus Preached the Gospel of the Kingdom</i>	17
B. <i>The Narrative of God's Kingdom</i>	21
Kingdom Original	21
Kingdom Fallen	22
Kingdom Promised	24
Kingdom Through Israel	25
Kingdom Prophesied	26
Kingdom Now (And Not Yet)	28
Kingdom Consummated	32
Summary of the Kingdom Gospel	33
C. <i>Implications of the Gospel of God's Kingdom</i>	35
Meditation 1: The Mission to Manifest God's Kingdom	37
Meditation 2: Social Justice in the Kingdom Gospel	38
Meditation 3: The Church as God's Kingdom Community	39
Significance of a Holistic Kingdom Gospel	40

Conclusion	43	Justice and Righteousness Expected Universally in Governance	98
<i>Discussion Questions</i>	45	God's Favour on the Poor	99
Interview: Bishop Emeritus Robert Solomon	46	<i>Chesed</i> as Covenantal Faithfulness	100
3. How did Social Justice Evolve Through the Bible? Justice, Mercy and Righteousness in the Old Testament	50	E. <i>Reflections on Justice, Mercy and Righteousness in the Old Testament</i>	100
A. <i>After The Fall</i>	52	<i>Discussion Questions</i>	103
B. <i>Justice, Mercy and Righteousness Pre-Israel</i>	53	Interview: Dr Goh Wei-Leong	104
Abraham Learns God's Justice and Righteousness	53	4. How did Social Justice Evolve Through the Bible? Justice, Mercy and Righteousness in the New Testament	112
<i>Chesed</i> : Mercy, Kindness and Steadfast Love	54	A. <i>The Model of Jesus</i>	113
Exodus: Freedom from Oppression into a Worship Community	54	Jesus and the Jubilee	113
C. <i>Justice, Mercy and Righteousness in the Laws for Israel</i>	58	Mary's Magnificat	116
Relevance of the Mosaic Law to Us	58	The Cross: Cosmic Justice, Social Justice	120
Justice, Mercy and Righteousness in the Mosaic Law	62	Jesus' Life and Ministry	121
Jubilee Law	63	Parable of the Good Samaritan	124
Jubilee Law and land	64	Matthew 25: Two Parables and the Final Judgment	127
Jubilee Law and socioeconomic justice	67	Parable of the Ten Virgins and Parable of the Talents	128
Jubilee Law and the Sabbath	74	The Final Judgment: Of Sheep and Goats	130
Reflections on the Jubilee Law	78	B. <i>The Model of the Church</i>	132
Gleaning laws	78	C. <i>Reflections on New Testament Survey</i>	138
Tithing laws	80	The Church as a Community of Justice and Righteousness	138
Intended beneficiaries of socioeconomic justice laws	81	The Church's community life	138
Treatment of foreigners	83	Justice only within the Church?	140
Treatment of workers, orphans, widows and the poor	87	The Church's witness to the world	143
Mercy in the Mosaic Law	90	Justice and Righteousness and the Ethics of Love and Good Works	144
D. <i>Justice, Mercy and Righteousness Beyond the Mosaic Law</i>	91	<i>Discussion Questions</i>	147
Injustice and Unrighteousness are a Sin Issue	91	Interview: Joshua Tan Kuan	148
Justice, Mercy and Righteousness is True Worship	94		
God's Judgment on Sins of Injustice and Unrighteousness	96		

5. What does Social Justice Mean to Me? Social Justice, the Micah Mandate and Covenantal Faithfulness	152	The Goal of Church Community Ministries	199
A. <i>Social Justice: In Search of Meaning</i>	153	Which Communities to Serve?	200
B. <i>Imperative of the Micah Mandate: Covenantal Faithfulness</i>	154	God’s Invitation to the Needy	201
C. <i>The Micah Mandate for the Christian</i>	157	Case Studies	203
<i>Discussion Questions</i>	165	Service to What Extent?—The Power of Passion	205
Interview: Michael Chiam	166	What Type of Justice and Mercy Work Should a Local Church Do?	206
Interview: Timothy Weerasekera	171	Where Does Evangelism Come in?	206
		<i>Discussion Questions</i>	209
6. Discovering Justice and Mercy Ministers in Singapore: Social Justice and Evangelism	174	Interview: Crystal Goh	210
A. <i>My Journey Discovering Justice and Mercy Ministers in Singapore</i>	175	Interview: Melissa Ong	215
B. <i>The Relationship Between Social Justice and Evangelism</i>	186	7. What’s Distinctive About the Christian View of Justice: Principles of Biblical Justice	224
Social Justice and Evangelism are Both Expressions of Christian Faith	186	A. <i>Causes of Injustice and Suffering</i>	225
Social Justice and Evangelism Need Not Always Go Together	187	B. <i>Didn’t God Allow the Suffering?</i>	229
Social Justice and Evangelism May be Expressed in Different Ways and to Different Extents for Each Individual	188	C. <i>Principles of Biblical Justice</i>	233
Evangelism and Discipleship are Paramount in Priority	189	Justice as Rights	233
Social Justice is the Result and Purpose of Evangelism and Discipleship	190	Justice is Justly Seeking Moral Good	239
Social Justice is the Bridge to Evangelism and Discipleship	190	Justice is Personal Care	240
Social Justice and Evangelism are Partners: They are the Demonstration and Proclamation of the Gospel of the Kingdom of God	192	Justice Prohibits Exploitation and Protects Livelihood	241
C. <i>Is This the Social Gospel or Liberation Theology?</i>	193	Justice is Generous Giving	242
D. <i>Social Justice Through Church Ministry or Church Members?</i>	195	Justice is Dignifying and Responsible	244
E. <i>How to Pursue Social Justice and Evangelism in Church Ministry</i>	198	Justice is Relational and Empathetic	250
		Justice is Restorative and Reconciliatory	254
		Justice is Deliverance: It Destroys the Tools and Systems of Oppression	256
		Justice is Advocacy: Being a Voice for the Voiceless	258
		Justice is Responsible Stewardship of Creation	260
		Justice is Practical Wisdom and Virtue	265

D. <i>Biblical Justice and Contemporary Theories of Justice</i>	266	9. What's the State of Social Justice in the Singapore Church Today? Challenges and Opportunities for the Singapore Church	330
<i>Discussion Questions</i>	268	A. <i>Where are We Now?</i>	331
Interview: Associate Professor Irene YH Ng	269	B. <i>Empirical Survey</i>	332
8. Should Our Ideas of Social Justice be Brought into Society? Justice and Righteousness in the Public Square	273	Demographics of Respondents	333
A. <i>The Anti-Trafficking Advocacy Experience</i>	274	Attitudes and Views on Social Justice and the Local Church	335
B. <i>Salt and Light in the Public Square</i>	277	Attitudes and Views on Civil Society	339
C. <i>What is the Public Square?</i>	281	Attitudes and Views on How Non-Christians View Christians in Singapore	340
D. <i>The Christian's Mandate: Express God's Love and Truth Through Word and Deed in the Public Square to the Glory of God</i>	282	C. <i>Trends in the Survey</i>	341
A Platform to Love by Communicating the Gospel	283	D. <i>Reflections and Lessons from the Survey</i>	343
A Platform to Love Neighbours and Love Ourselves by Shaping Public Matters Informed by God's Loving Truth	284	A Challenge to Church Leaders	344
Loving neighbours as ourselves	284	Engage Your Local Church	347
Public matters informed by God's loving truth	285	Opportunity for Witness, Discipleship and Gospel	348
Christ and culture, God's Kingdom and earthly kingdoms	285	E. <i>Some Justice Issues in Singapore</i>	349
Individual and societal impact of presenting our Christian worldview in the public square	295	F. <i>Need for Catalyst and Community</i>	350
A Platform for Loving Neighbours in Deed	296	<i>Discussion Questions</i>	353
E. <i>What is Civil Dialogue and Why Participate in It?</i>	296	Interview: Eunice Lim	354
F. <i>Application in Singapore</i>	301	10. Journey's End—or What's the Point of All This?	370
<i>Discussion Questions</i>	304	A. <i>Returning to the First Things</i>	371
Interview: Rev Dr Daniel Koh	305	B. <i>The End and Always is Being with</i>	375
Interview: Dr David LT Yap	315	C. <i>The Joy of the Just</i>	378
Interview: Lawrence Ko	323		

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And to my beloved wife, Ethel.

Finally, you may have many questions after reading this book. In particular, the “so what should I do now?” question. You should know that this book is not meant to be prescriptive. As I will elaborate in the subsequent chapters, there can be no static or one-size-fits-all approach to the question of what to do now. Each of us must discover first who we are before God and then His calling on our life. We must let a deep and holistic understanding of the Gospel permeate and transform our lives and behaviour from the inside out rather than from the outside in. Truth be told, this book isn’t going to be enough for that to happen. That is why I, along with others who share the same burden, am committed to helping you continue the journey after reading this book through the ministry of Micah Singapore, a catalyst community group which envisions the Singapore Church embracing integral mission, especially biblical social justice, as a core aspect of the Christian faith. More information can be found in the last chapter.

My hope is that this book will enrich you in your faith journey, in discovering God’s heartbeat and will for you, as it has for me.

Soli Deo Gloria.

2

What’s Social Justice Got to Do with God’s Story? The Gospel of the Kingdom Of God

Then Pilate said to him, "So you are a king?" Jesus answered, "You say that I am a king. For this purpose I was born and for this purpose I have come into the world—to bear witness to the truth. Everyone who is of the truth listens to my voice."

—John 18:37

But what are kings, when regiment is gone,
But perfect shadows in a sunshine day?

—Christopher Marlowe

The Gospel is central to the Christian faith because it is the central narrative in God's revealed word. If social justice is absent from the Gospel, it cannot be important. Further, the conception of one's Gospel, either too narrow or too wide, will affect the place of social justice in one's

faith. So I shall begin with discussing what I think the Gospel is.

Reflecting on my journey thus far, I realised that before I could discover the biblical meaning of justice, I had to first understand the Gospel of the Kingdom of God. A Kingdom paradigm was a necessary overarching narrative by which everything else could make sense. It is also the framework which allows me to make sense of the purported tensions between the Old

• • •

The Kingdom Gospel is the story of God establishing His Kingdom by gathering His people under His rule on earth and in heaven through the perfect King, Jesus Christ.

Testament and the New Testament.⁴ It is the central narrative of the entire Bible. The Kingdom Gospel is the story of God establishing His Kingdom by gathering His people under His rule on earth and in heaven through the perfect King, Jesus Christ. The consequence of this Kingdom Gospel is that the Church as God's Kingdom community must manifest the Kingdom Gospel by living a life of integral discipleship, which includes practising biblical social justice.

In this chapter, I will sketch out a broad outline of the Gospel that I understand the Bible's main thrust to be. Then I will elucidate the implications of the Gospel followed by meditations on social justice and the Gospel. These meditations are only preliminary and will be fleshed out in the subsequent chapters. So what is the Gospel?

A. Jesus Preached the Gospel of the Kingdom

Perhaps we should start with the four gospels, traditionally known to be the Gospels of Jesus Christ as told respectively by Matthew, Mark, Luke and John (like how one event could be covered by *The Straits Times*, *Channel NewsAsia* and *TODAY*). In the gospels, Jesus was described to have preached the Gospel of the Kingdom of God or the Kingdom

⁴ The hermeneutical approach undergirding this Biblical Theology (which adopts a historical approach based on the structural unity of the theology expressed across, and from, the whole Bible itself) as opposed to Systematic Theology (which is logical, systematic, didactic and apologetic in its focus): See John Bright, *The Authority of the Old Testament* (Baker Book House, 1975); Grant Osborne, *The Hermeneutical Spiral: A Comprehensive Introduction to Biblical Interpretation* (IVP Academic, 2006) at pp 347-373; Graeme Goldsworthy, *Gospel and Kingdom* (Paternoster Press, 1998), 22-43. Kingdom theology is not the only way to read the Bible. But in the way that the subplots of a story do not detract from the main plot, this does not undermine the Kingdom narrative. There are also other ways to read the Old and New Testaments in unity, e.g., covenant theology. (See e.g., Andreas J Köstenberger and Richard D Patterson, *Invitation to Biblical Interpretation* (Kregel, 2011) at 174-187.) I do not think that Kingdom theology is inconsistent with covenant theology. Without the benefit of space for elaboration, it appears to me that the latter is a subset of the former.

of Heaven.⁵ What was this Gospel? Why didn't the gospel writers, who purported to tell the Gospel, expressly and specifically spell it out?

But they did! They each purported to tell the Gospel, each with their own unique characteristics and emphases, but all telling the same Gospel. Upon closer study of the four gospels, we would realise that the Gospel is not only 1 Corinthians 15:1-5. Why else would the gospel writers record so many things about Jesus' birth, genealogy, teachings, miracles, acts and relationships? John expressly summarised the Gospel thus:⁶

Now Jesus did many other signs in the presence of the disciples, which are not written in this book; but these are written so that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that by believing you may have life in his name.

Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God. It sounds trite to us. That's because we have come to take for granted that Jesus is the Christ. (Some people may even think that Christ is Jesus' surname!) The original readers of Matthew, Mark, Luke and John would have been floored by the news that the Christ (the Messiah) has come!

What about the "Son of God"? Studies reveal that the original audience of the gospel writers would have identified the parallels between on the one hand, the Roman Caesars as self-declared 'Lords', emperors or 'sons of god' and the *euangelion* (meaning gospel, good news) of their victories and ascendancy to power, and on the other hand, Jesus as a humble servant King.

5 Matthew 4:23; 9:35; 13; Mark 1:14-15; Mark 4; Luke 4:43; 8:1, 14-15; 16:16-17; 21:29-33; John 3:3.

6 John 20:30-31.

At that time, pervasive propaganda promoted Caesar as a saviour who would bring civilisation, peace and justice (*Pax Romana*) to the whole world. Archaeological findings and other historical literature reveal that Octavian a.k.a. Augustus Tiberian Caesar relied on oracles and myths which told of his adopted father Julius Caesar becoming a god to assert himself as a 'son of god'. It's been suggested that when Jesus picked up a denarius coin and declared "render unto Caesar the things that are Caesar's and to God the things that are God's", the coin was likely to have been inscribed with the phrase "Caesar Augustus Tiberius, son of the Divine Augustus".⁷ By Jesus specifically qualifying His answer with "render unto... God the things that are God's", He was asserting that people could certainly pay taxes to Caesar as they rightfully should because Caesar was authorised by God to rule in the first place.⁸ But God alone is worthy of total worship. By referring to Jesus as Son of God, the gospel writers were not only declaring Jesus' deity. They were declaring Him to be the true Saviour of the World, the real King, declaring that "Jesus is Lord [and] Caesar is not".⁹

The 'euangelion'¹⁰ that the gospel writers were telling us about is that Jesus is established as the King of God's Kingdom! This is where the

7 See Paul Barnett, "Jesus, Paul and Peter and the Roman State" in *Pilgrims and Citizens: Christian Social Engagement in East Asia Today*, ed. Michael Nai-Chiu Poon (ATF Press, 2006), 68.

8 Romans 13:1-7; 1 Peter 2:13-17.

9 See Scot McKnight and Joseph B Modica, eds., *Jesus is Lord Caesar is Not: Evaluating Empire in New Testament Studies* (InterVarsity Press, 2013).

10 Judith A Diehl, "Anti-Imperial Rhetoric in the New Testament" in Scot McKnight and Joseph B Modica, eds., *Jesus is Lord Caesar is Not: Evaluating Empire in New Testament Studies* (InterVarsity Press, 2013) at pp 48-49. Diehl notes that specific events in Mark's gospel bear striking similarity to the stories and myths of Emperor Vespasian. For instance, certain contemporary Roman historians wrote that Vespasian healed with spittle, paralleling the account in Mark 7:32-37; 8:22-26, but whereas Vespasian did it in full view of an amazed crowd to prove his power, Jesus instructed people not to tell anyone about the healing. In another anecdote, when Vespasian defeated Vitellius and the latter was led to his execution, it was recorded that one of the emperor's supporters actually cut off an ear of a soldier guarding him. This would be a striking parallel to the account in Mark 14:47. The point then is that the Gospels contained these subtle subtexts which sought to juxtapose Jesus and Caesar, but ultimately exalt Jesus as the true king worthy of worship.

Old Testament Scriptures come in. We must understand the person of Christ as revealed by God in both the Old Testament and New Testament. It's like how one cannot only read the third book in the Lord of the Rings trilogy and expect to comprehend the whole plot!

Luke 24:13-35 emphasises this. Two former disciples of Jesus had just left Jerusalem and were on a road to Emmaus. There, they encountered a stranger who asked them why they looked downcast. They explained that their master, Jesus, had been crucified. The stranger then explained everything to them. Luke 24:25-27 describes it:

And he said to them, "O foolish ones, and slow of heart to believe all that the prophets have spoken! Was it not necessary that the Christ should suffer these things and enter into his glory?" *And beginning with Moses and all the Prophets, he interpreted to them in all the Scriptures the things concerning himself.* (Emphasis added)

By the time the stranger finished his course, it was evening. The two disciples urged the stranger to stay the night with them. When the stranger gave thanks and broke bread at supper, the spiritual eyes of the two men were opened and they realised that the stranger was none other than Jesus! Then Jesus disappeared. And somehow they finally understood the Gospel! Immediately, they got up and dashed back to Jerusalem to tell the other disciples of what had transpired.

Luke 24 shows us that understanding the Gospel—and indeed, knowing Jesus—requires a proper understanding of the Old

Testament Scriptures.¹¹ The whole Bible is witness to this Gospel!¹²

I will now attempt to briefly sketch out my understanding of the biblical narrative of God's Kingdom here because it is integral to my understanding of biblical social justice and Christian discipleship.

B. The Narrative of God's Kingdom

Kingdom Original

The biblical narrative begins in Genesis 1-2 with God creating humanity to be His people and the Garden of Eden to be the place where He would dwell with humanity. Humanity is represented by the first man and woman, Adam and Eve. God looked at His entire creation and said it was "very good".¹³ The Hebrew word translated as "good" is "towb", which is associated with "beautiful", "pleasing" and "agreeable". So the way things were at the beginning was good, beautiful and pleasing to God.

God then bestowed on humanity an important duty of stewardship over the earth: To be kings and queens of the earth under God's ultimate Kingship.¹⁴ This necessarily included the physical and the intangible, the

11 While Luke 24:27 refers only to the Law of Moses, i.e., Genesis to Deuteronomy, and the Prophets (Joshua, Judges, 1 Samuel to 2 Kings and the prophets excluding Daniel, which is included in "the Writings" under the Jewish Scriptures), in contrast to the three categories in Luke 24:44, it is likely that the reference to "all the Scriptures" includes all the Jewish Scriptures, i.e., the Old Testament: see Carson, et. al., *New Bible Commentary* (IVP, 1994), 1019.

12 On this I would recommend several books: Vaughan Roberts' *God's Big Picture*; Graeme Goldsworthy's *Gospel and Kingdom*; NT Wright's *How God Became King: The Forgotten Story of the Gospels*. See also C René Padilla, *Mission Between the Times* (Langham Monographs, 2010) at 83-102; Scot McKnight, *Kingdom Conspiracy: Returning to the Radical Mission of the Local Church* (Brazos Press, 2014); Kevin DeYoung & Greg Gilbert, *What Is the Mission of the Church? Making Sense of Social Justice, Shalom and the Great Commission* (Crossway, 2011), 67-90.

13 Genesis 1:31.

14 Genesis 1:28; 2:15.

natural and the cultural.¹⁵ Thus began God’s Kingdom on earth: The relationships between God, humanity and creation were as God intended them to be. God’s Word was given and treasured, to which Adam and Eve submitted. We can glean from this the Pattern of the Kingdom: God’s people, God’s dwelling place, and God’s rule and blessing.¹⁶

God’s People	Adam and Eve
God’s Place	Eden
God’s Rule	God’s word Direct relationship with God in His visible presence

Kingdom Fallen

Then the Fall happened. The essential wrong committed by Adam and Eve was that they were not satisfied with being kings under God’s Kingship; they wanted to be “like God”;¹⁷ they wanted to take God’s place and become ultimate Kings.

Because of the Fall, God’s people were banished from the presence of God.¹⁸ And instead of God’s rule and blessings, there were curses.¹⁹ The consequence of the Fall was three-fold. Disruptions in the relationships: (i) Between God and humanity; (ii) within humanity; and (iii) between humanity and creation.²⁰

The first is evident in the banishment from God’s presence. This consequence is referred to in the Bible as death. It’s clear the Bible is not

15 TM Moore, *Culture Matters: A Call for Consensus on Christian Cultural Engagement* (BrazoPress, 2007), 104.
 16 See also Graeme Goldsworthy, *Gospel and Kingdom* (Paternoster Press, 1998), 46.
 17 Genesis 3:5.
 18 Genesis 3:24.
 19 Genesis 3:16-19, 23.
 20 Vaughan Roberts’ *God’s Big Picture* (IVP, 2009) at 39-41.

only talking about physical death but eternal spiritual death. That is an eternal separation from God. Genesis poetically refers to the Tree of Life in Eden. Banishment from Eden post-Fall was banishment from eternal life. The Bible conversely contemplates eternal death. Verses referring to hell suggest an eternal state of eviction from God’s Kingdom full of suffering and darkness.²¹ Perhaps one way to imagine it would be simply the worst state of the world in despair.

The second consequence was first evident in the relationship between Adam and Eve,²² and later in the events which followed (e.g., Abel’s murder). The third is evident in God’s declaration that creation would rebel against, and cause pain to, humanity.²³ Elsewhere in the Bible, we also see that the sin of humanity is interwoven with the bondage and suffering of creation.²⁴ Yet, God expressed grace and mercy to humanity. Already in Genesis 3:15, God promised that the offspring of Eve would bruise or “crush” (NIV) the serpent’s head. This promise is traditionally deemed by scholars as the “first gospel” or “protevangelion” in that it is the first hint of a saviour for humanity.²⁵

God could have, but did not, destroy humanity there. Instead, He had to sacrifice the life of animals in order to cover the ‘shame’ of humanity.²⁶ He preserved the image of Himself in humanity²⁷ and consequentially decreed order in human society.²⁸

Before Adam and Eve consumed the fruit of the knowledge of good and evil, they were naked but unashamed of it. The moment

21 Revelation 19:20; Revelation 20:13-14; Revelation 21:8; Matthew 25:46; 2 Thessalonians 1:9; Matthew 13:42, 50; Matthew 25:41; Mark 9:43; Jude 1:7.
 22 Genesis 3:12, 16.
 23 Genesis 3:17-19.
 24 Romans 8:19-23.
 25 Carson, et. al., *New Bible Commentary* (IVP, 1994) at 63; Victor P. Hamilton, *Handbook on the Pentateuch*, 2nd edn. (Baker Academic, 2005) at 44-46.
 26 Genesis 3:21.
 27 Genesis 5:1-3.
 28 Genesis 9:6.

they consumed the fruit, they became ashamed of it.²⁹ God immediately connected their self-perception of nakedness to violating His command not to eat the fruit.³⁰ This suggests to me that human morality—what humanity considers to be good and evil—is a matter of perception and relativism. What God created to be good, beautiful and pleasing—divine morality—is objective. It does not matter whether I believe that as a human being, I can fly by jumping off the top of a building. God made gravity. And this is an objective fact. Humanity chose to see what God sees to be good, beautiful and pleasing as shameful. Thus humanity’s sin was and is that they choose to be the ultimate when only God is and can be: Ultimate kings of their lives and of the world—ultimate arbiters of morality.

Where human morality deviates from God’s way of right relationships, of good and evil, negative consequences ensue. Because people live in a way which is divorced from the objective moral facts of what is good and right, people live apart from the ultimate Kingship of God. In the Genesis 3 narrative, the consequence of humanity’s wrongdoing was shame, escapism, suffering and mortality.

God’s People	No one
God’s Place	No place
God’s Rule	Humanity rejected God’s rule

Kingdom Promised

Following Adam and Eve’s banishment from Eden, the next significant milestone is the Abrahamic Covenant. God promised Abram (later

29 Genesis 3:7.
30 Genesis 3:11.

named Abraham) that He would bless Abram, restore His Kingdom through Abram, and bless the whole world through Abram’s descendants.³¹ Yet, God’s promises made in the Abrahamic Covenant were later only partially fulfilled in the nation of Israel. The complete fulfilment of the Abrahamic Covenant was in Jesus Christ. Indeed, Jesus is Abraham’s descendant through whom the whole world is blessed. It is no coincidence that the narrative of Jesus being God’s Son, a sacrifice for the sins of the world, is parallel to the nerve-wrecking episode of Abraham almost sacrificing his son Isaac:³² God Himself will provide the sacrifice for worship³³ and it is by faith that we may obtain the blessings of that sacrificial worship.³⁴ The Abrahamic Covenant reveals that God promised to establish His Kingdom in relation to the whole world. The entrance ticket to God’s Kingdom extended to Gentiles was not an afterthought.

God’s People	Abraham’s descendants
God’s Place	Canaan
God’s Rule	Abrahamic Covenant

Kingdom Through Israel

The next milestone is the formation of the nation of Israel. During this stage, God made a covenant with Israel (what Christians today would refer to as the Old or Mosaic Covenant) and made the Israelites His people.³⁵ During the desert years, God made the nation of Israel and the Tabernacle

31 Genesis 12:1-3, 7; 15.
32 Genesis 22.
33 Genesis 22:14.
34 Hebrews 11:17-19; Genesis 22:17-18.
35 Exodus 19:6.

the place in which He would dwell with His people.³⁶ When Israel entered into Canaan and then later set up capital in Jerusalem, the Temple became God's dwelling place. It was during this stage that God delivered the Mosaic Law to Israel. The Law was meant to set out God's justice and righteousness, which we will explore in a later chapter.

God's People	Old Testament Israel
God's Place	Canaan and Jerusalem; Tabernacle and Temple
God's Rule	The Mosaic Law

Kingdom Prophesied

Yet, time and again, Israel could not live up to God's justice and righteousness expressed in the Law. After the time of Moses and Joshua was the time of the judges, a violent and lawless chapter in Israel's history. A key line which repeats several times in the book of Judges, like a refrain in a folk song, is this: "In those days *there was no king in Israel*. Everyone did what was right in his own eyes" (emphasis added).³⁷ Because Israel had abandoned the rule of God as King, injustice, unrighteousness, violence and lawlessness flourished.

But Israel kept 'looking for answers in all the wrong places'. They demanded the prophet Samuel ask God for a human king to rule over them, just like how all the other nations had human kings.³⁸ God said to Samuel that by this, Israel had "rejected [Him] from being king over them".³⁹ Yet,

36 Exodus 29:44-46; Psalm 114:2.

37 Judges 17:6; 18:1; 19:1; 21:25.

38 1 Samuel 8.

39 1 Samuel 8:7.

God gave Israel a king: King Saul. Things were fine at the start with King Saul but when he started messing up and God decided to appoint David to the throne, it soon descended into a theatre of politicking, betrayal, violence and so on. Even after King David took the throne, things were rough (David's rape of Bathsheba and murder of her husband, the sins and rebellion of David's son Absalom, among other events).

Yet, even in the nadir of God's Kingdom, there was hope. In 2 Samuel 7, David decided to build a house for God since he was living in a lavish palace while God was still living in a tent. God refused David his plan and instead told David a prophecy of the Messiah or Christ. In 2 Samuel 7:12-16, God declares:

When your days are fulfilled and you lie down with your fathers, I will raise up your offspring after you, who shall come from your body, and I will establish his kingdom. He shall build a house for my name, and I will establish the throne of his kingdom forever. I will be to him a father, and he shall be to me a son. When he commits iniquity, I will discipline him with the rod of men, with the stripes of the sons of men, but my steadfast love will not depart from him, as I took it from Saul, whom I put away from before you. And your house and your kingdom shall be made sure forever before me. Your throne shall be established forever.

This promise made to David is known as the Davidic Covenant. It is widely regarded as one of the most important passages and promises in the Old Testament. Walter Brueggemann considers this passage to be "one of the most crucial texts in the Old Testament for evangelical

faith”, and this promise to be the “taproot of the messianic idea in ancient Israel”.⁴⁰

It may appear that David’s son, Solomon, fulfilled this prophecy. But that was only a partial fulfilment. King David’s descendants later reigned on the throne of Judah for only about four centuries before Judah was extinguished. After King Solomon’s demise, Israel was a broken kingdom. Civil war erupted. Kings came and went. Yet, God did not forsake His people. God’s Kingdom was in ruins.

But through His prophets, both the exilic and post-exilic prophets, God reiterated to His people the prophecy of redemption and the establishment of an everlasting Kingdom in the future.⁴¹ As late as the last prophet Malachi in around 4th Century BC, the Davidic Covenant had still not been fulfilled. Then came 400 years of silence. God’s Kingdom was in shambles. Until the Christ, the Messiah, broke into the world to fulfil the Davidic Covenant.

God’s People	Nation of Israel; Later, remnant of Israel
God’s Place	Temple; New temple during post-exilic period
God’s Rule	Earthly king; Mosaic Law; Promise of a future Kingdom

Kingdom Now (And Not Yet)

Then the long awaited King arrived. In Luke 1:31-33, God’s angels declared to Mary:

40 Walter Brueggemann, *First and Second Samuel* (Louisville: John Knox Press, 1990) at 253, 257.

41 Jeremiah 23:5-6; 31:31-34; Isaiah 9:6-7; 11.

And behold, you will conceive in your womb and bear a son, and you shall call his name Jesus. He will be great and will be called the Son of the Most High. And the Lord God will give to him *the throne of his father David, and he will reign over the house of Jacob forever, and of his kingdom there will be no end.* (Emphasis added)

When Jesus commenced His public ministry, He declared “[t]he time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God is at hand; repent and believe in the gospel”.⁴² All the ‘hints’ in the Old Testament led to that “time”:⁴³ Jesus is the fulfilment of God’s promises concerning the Messiah and the Kingdom of God.⁴⁴

Under the New Covenant, the people of God’s Kingdom constitute all who are in Christ—the Church.⁴⁵ In this sense, the Kingdom establishes the Church. And the Church is a part, and is representative, of the Kingdom.⁴⁶

42 Mark 1:15.

43 E.g., Genesis 3:15: the ‘protevangelion’ of the offspring of Eve bruising or crushing the Serpent’s offspring; Abrahamic covenant in Genesis 12, 15; Genesis 22: Abraham sacrificing Isaac on the altar only to be stopped by God’s angels, whereupon God Himself provided the sacrifice; the Passover in Exodus as model of Jesus as the Christian’s Passover; the golden serpent which Israelites looked upon and lived: Numbers 21:8-9; John 3:14; the sacrificial system and the Day of Atonement: Hebrews 10:1-14; the promise of a Davidic everlasting King in 2 Samuel 7:12-16, Isaiah 9:6-7; Isaiah 42:1-9; 49:5-7; Daniel 7:27 fulfilled in Luke 1:32-33; Jesus as the Suffering Servant in Isaiah 53; promise of the New Covenant in Jeremiah 31:33-34; herald of the one who comes in the name of the Lord in Malachi 3:1 and Isaiah 40:3 fulfilled in Mark 1:2-3 and 3:2-3; Psalms 22; 69; 110 (see Matthew 22:41-46; Mark 12:35-37); prophecy of the Messiah would atone for sins and bring everlasting righteousness in Daniel 9:24-27; in Acts 13:16-41, apostle Paul gave a concise sermon stretching from Abraham, Israel in Egypt to Jesus as the Christ fulfilling the promises of God made throughout Israel’s history; every covenantal promise by God is fulfilled, finds its ‘amen’, in Christ: 2 Corinthians 1:20: see Warren W Wiersbe, *The Bible Exposition Commentary*, Vol. 1 (Victor Books, 1989) at 279; Vaughan Roberts’ *God’s Big Picture* (IVP, 2009) at 113-128; C René Padilla, *Mission Between the Times* (Langham Monographs, 2010) at 91-94.

44 C René Padilla, *Mission Between the Times* (Langham Monographs, 2010) at 86-91.

45 1 Peter 1:3-2:10.

46 But the Kingdom is not equivalent to the Church; the Kingdom is much larger than the Church: John F Balchin, *I Want To Know What The Bible Says About The Church* (Kingsway Publications, 1979) at 20-21.

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**Jesus is the
fulfilment
of God's
promises
concerning the
Messiah and
the Kingdom
of God.**

Jesus is the place of God's presence: He is the tabernacle and temple of God itself.⁴⁷ God's rule and blessings are found within a New Covenant established by Jesus' work on the Cross,⁴⁸ sealed by His blood and open to all peoples and nations, not just Israel.⁴⁹ It is by Jesus' work as the mediator of the New Covenant that all who are found under this covenant are free from their sins and entitled to the eternal inheritance of the Kingdom of God.⁵⁰ It is important to recognise that while

the forgiveness of sins is an important aspect of the New Covenant, it is not the be all and end all.

It is a means to a larger end: Entrance into the Kingdom of God in which believers become a people of God⁵¹ and can draw near to the presence of God.⁵²

Jesus Christ—the King of God's Kingdom, the King over all human kings and rulers, the King who created the whole universe—carried my sins and the consequences of all my sins—my shame, guilt, brokenness, suffering—onto the Cross, and paid the price of my sin, that is, death, so that I can be made whole, good and beautiful. So that I can have a right relationship with God, right relationships with other people and right relationships with creation. So that I can become a citizen of the Kingdom of God, along with all the Christians past, present and future, that is the Church, the family of God.

47 John 1:14; 2:13-22.

48 See generally John Stott, *The Cross of Christ* (IVP Books, 2006).

49 Jeremiah 31:31-34; Isaiah 42:6; Luke 22:20; 1 Corinthians 11:25; Hebrews 8-10.

50 Hebrews 9:15; Colossians 1:12-13.

51 1 Peter 2:9-10.

52 Hebrews 10:19-22.

And now this King is picking up all the broken pieces. He is reconciling all things to Himself.⁵³ He is rebuilding and restoring the Kingdom of God. This King is reconciling all of us to enter into His Kingdom. And the entrance into the Kingdom of God is at the Cross of the King.

The Cross is the means by which the new form of God's Kingdom is inaugurated. The Cross is central to, and shapes the ethos of, this Kingdom. God's King establishes His Lordship as a humble suffering servant who took up the Cross rather than the sword,⁵⁴ and who for that reason was exalted to the status of King *over all earthly Kings*.⁵⁵

The utter failure of God's Kingdom on earth preceding Jesus was not because God messed up His plan. In His sovereign will, He destined that humanity would descend into darkness and silence for it to be ready for the ultimate King. Jesus entered the world as the Suffering Servant who would live, die and rise again in order to establish God's Kingdom on earth. NT Wright in *How God Became King: The Forgotten Story of the Gospels* summarises the message of the four gospels as "the story of Jesus [being] the story of how Israel's God became king" of the whole world.⁵⁶

The Gospel of the Kingdom is not only about the death and resurrection of Jesus, as though His earthly life was merely the byproduct of a divine plan. The earthly life and public ministry of Jesus was meant to show us what Kingdom life would look like; what the nation of Israel was supposed to be; how the people of God are supposed to live; the last Adam,⁵⁷ the true Man. *Jesus' life showed us God's way of being human.*

53 Colossians 1:19-20.

54 Jesus refused at many points to take up power as an earthly king or wield violence or earthly forms of power: John 6:15; Luke 4:5-8; Matthew 4:8-11; Luke 22:49-51.

55 Philippians 2:5-11; 1 Timothy 6:13-16; Hebrews 12:2; Revelation 4-5; 19:16. See also John Howard Yoder, *The Politics of Jesus* (Eerdmans, 1994), 51, and Elizabeth Phillips, *Political Theology: A Guide for the Perplexed* (T&T Clark International, 2012), 79.

56 NT Wright, *How God Became King: The Forgotten Story of the Gospels* (HarperOne, 2012), 38.

57 1 Corinthians 15:45.

God's People	All who are in Christ, i.e., the Church
God's Place	Jesus Christ as the true Tabernacle and Temple
God's Rule	New Covenant in Christ

Kingdom Consummated

Yet, Jesus' work during His Incarnation brought about a mysterious state of God's Kingdom: It is now and not yet; present yet future; fulfilled but not yet consummated.⁵⁸ While Jesus had done all that was necessary to restore God's Kingdom on earth, He expressly stated that the restoration would not be completed in His time on earth; there was work to be done.⁵⁹ Instead, He declared that He would return one day and only then would the restoration and establishment of God's Kingdom be complete,⁶⁰ would "[t]he kingdom of the world... become *the kingdom of our Lord and of his Christ, and he shall reign forever and ever*" (emphasis added).⁶¹

The epistles constantly refer to this hope.⁶² Revelation 21 shows us a glimpse of what the future-consummated Kingdom would be like. There, God would dwell directly with His people⁶³ comprising people of all races, nations and languages whose names are in Jesus's Book of Life⁶⁴ in the Holy City of God, the New Jerusalem.⁶⁵ There'd be no more brokenness and suffering.⁶⁶ The tree of life in the Edenic Kingdom shows up again in

58 Graeme Goldsworthy, *Gospel and Kingdom* (Paternoster Press, 1998), 95-96; John Piper, "Is the Kingdom Present or Future?" (4 Feb 1990).

59 Acts 1:6-8.

60 Matthew 26:29; John 14:1-4; Luke 17:22-37; 19:11-12.

61 Revelation 11:15.

62 1 Corinthians 13:9-12; Colossians 3:4; 2 Peter 3:3-10.

63 Revelation 21:3.

64 Revelation 21:24, 27.

65 Revelation 21:2.

66 Revelation 21:4.

the consummated Kingdom.⁶⁷ This is important for our discussion on social justice. Without having the end in mind, we may lose our perspective of the present. I discuss this in a later chapter.

God's People	All found in Christ, whose names are in the Book of Life
God's Place	New Heaven and New Earth; New Jerusalem; God the Father and God the Son are the temple
God's Rule	Direct relationship with God in His visible presence

Summary of the Kingdom Gospel

How then would I explain in one sentence what this Gospel is? To me, *the Kingdom Gospel is the good news that God is establishing His Kingdom by gathering His people under His rule on earth and in heaven through Jesus, the long-awaited Christ.*

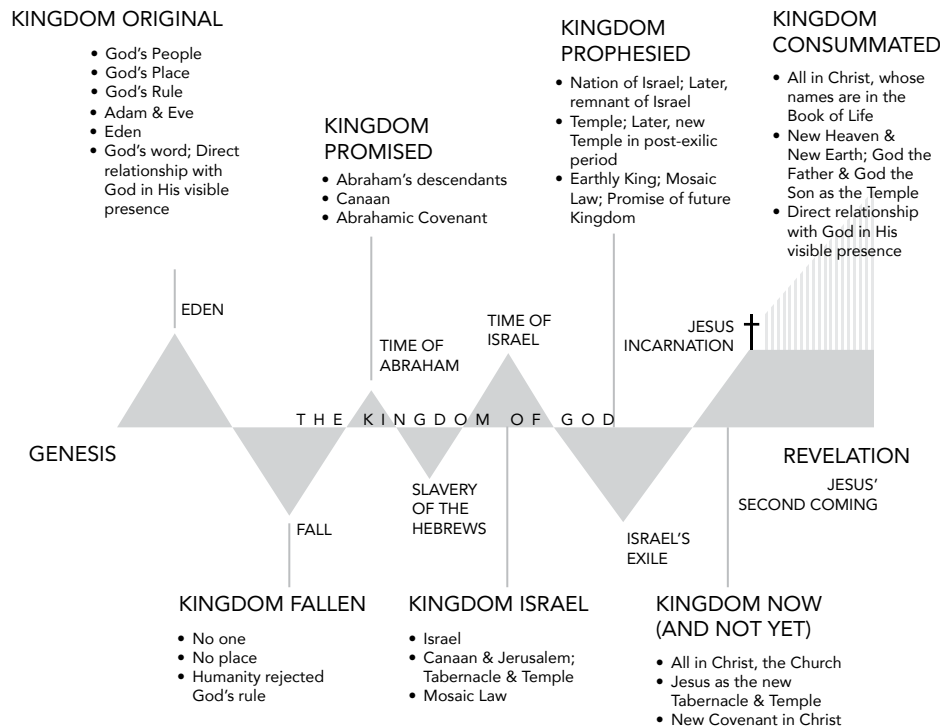
This three-fold framework of God's Kingdom as God's people, God's place and God's rule is helpful for us in understanding the Gospel. It helps us to remember that the Gospel is not only about individuals but also entire communities; the Gospel is about both tangible and intangible places; the Gospel is about God's kingly rule.

God's Kingdom is like people living in a country who left their land desolate for a long time. One day, a gardener comes to teach the people how to tend their land. As people become captivated by this gardener, those parts of the land they live in become filled with beautiful trees, plants and creatures. God's Kingdom reign expands as more people are

67 Revelation 22:2.

captivated by the beauty of the gardener’s work and also take up the joyful task of tending their own land. In CS Lewis’ *The Lion, The Witch and The Wardrobe*, the White Witch’s spell over Narnia caused a 100-year long winter. But the winter curse broke as Aslan returned to Narnia and roamed the land. Indeed, this beautiful image helps us remember that the Gospel is about the reign of God’s Kingdom.

A summary of the progression of God’s Kingdom as recorded in the biblical narrative is set out in this graphical chart.



C. Implications of the Gospel of God’s Kingdom

The Gospel of the Kingdom of God has profound implications on how we as God’s people ought to live today. I think there are four main implications to this Gospel which concern the concept of “salvation”, a word many of us toss around without understanding its biblical meaning.⁶⁸ And I have three meditations on social justice and the Kingdom Gospel.

a. Individual reconciliation with God: Justification, or the satisfaction of the just—the forgiveness of our sins because of Jesus’ work on the Cross so that we may have a relationship with a holy and just God.⁶⁹

b. Individual transformation in the Holy Spirit: Our ongoing sanctification,⁷⁰ and confession of, and repentance from, sins; learning to do as Jesus teaches us to do;⁷¹ our faith working through love and good works.⁷²

c. Membership in the Church as the community of God’s Kingdom people: While we are being transformed, we are to live according to the way of God’s Kingdom instead of the world’s systems and values;⁷³ God’s Kingdom being established on earth, as against the world’s kingdoms;⁷⁴ Christians and the Church going out into the world to seek

68 See C René Padilla, *Mission Between the Times* (Langham Monographs, 2010) at 96-99; Kevin DeYoung & Greg Gilbert, *What Is the Mission of the Church? Making Sense of Social Justice, Shalom and the Great Commission* (Crossway, 2011) at 118-139.

69 Romans 5:1-2; Ephesians 2:5; Titus 3:5.

70 1 Corinthians 1:18; 2 Corinthians 2:15.

71 Matthew 28:20; John 15:10.

72 Galatians 5:6.

73 John 15:18-21; Romans 12:2; James 4:4; 1 John 2:15-17.

74 See Shane Claiborne and Chris Haw, *Jesus for President* (Zondervan, 2008), 65-137.

reconciliation of people to God,⁷⁵ inviting people into the Kingdom of God, thereby transforming the world, individual by individual, each from the inside out.⁷⁶

d. *Shalom*: “*Shalom*” is often translated as “peace” but its biblical usage suggests something much deeper: “[It] is the human being dwelling at peace in all his or her relationships with God, with self, with fellows, with nature... *Shalom* at its highest is *enjoyment* in one’s relationship”.⁷⁷ As the Westminster Shorter Catechism instructs us, the chief end of man is to “glorify God, and to enjoy Him forever”. It is in Christ that *shalom* can be brought about.⁷⁸ The Gospel of God’s Kingdom is the Gospel of *shalom*.⁷⁹ Nicholas Wolterstorff says that “[s]*halom* is both God’s cause in the world and our human calling”.⁸⁰ At the same time, it is clear that

complete *shalom* will only be realised in the future consummated Kingdom where our sanctification will be complete and we will be glorified.⁸¹ What we enjoy now is a foretaste of *shalom* in God’s consummated Kingdom. The individual Christian’s role then is to proclaim and demonstrate the Gospel of *shalom* so that others too may enter into *shalom* in Christ.

The Gospel
of God’s
Kingdom is
the Gospel
of *shalom*.

75 Colossians 1:15-20; 2 Corinthians 5:18-21.

76 Matthew 28:19-20.

77 Nicholas Wolterstorff, *Until Justice and Peace Embrace* (William B Eerdmans Publishing, 1983); cf., Kevin DeYoung & Greg Gilbert, *What Is the Mission of the Church? Making Sense of Social Justice, Shalom and the Great Commission* (Crossway, 2011) at 197-213.

78 Isaiah 9:6; Luke 1:79; 2:24, 29.

79 Acts 10:36; Ephesians 2:17. C. René Padilla, *Mission Between the Times* (Langham Monographs, 2010) at 94-96.

80 Nicholas Wolterstorff, *Until Justice and Peace Embrace* (William B Eerdmans Publishing, 1983).

81 Romans 8:18-25; Philippians 1:6, 2:10-11, 3:21; Revelation 21; 1 Peter 1:5; 2 Peter 3:13.

Meditation 1: The Mission to Manifest God’s Kingdom

Through His life, Jesus showed us what Kingdom life on earth, what God’s mission (*missio Dei*), looks like. His work was to ‘manifest’ the name of God and His Kingdom, and He sent His disciples out into the world to do likewise.⁸² He showed us that the *manifestation* of the Gospel is the *proclamation* of the Gospel and the *demonstration* of the Gospel. When He declared that the Kingdom of God was at hand,⁸³ I think He was not saying that the Kingdom was ‘*akan datang*’ or ‘coming soon’. He was saying that the Kingdom was right there. He was revealing the Kingdom itself. That is why in Luke 17:20-21, when asked by the Pharisees when the Kingdom would come, Jesus replied, “The kingdom of God is not coming in ways that can be observed, nor will they say, ‘Look, here it is!’ or ‘There!’ for behold, the kingdom of God is in the midst of you”.

And I don’t think He said that only because He was *the King* of the Kingdom. I think He meant that, as someone who perfectly lived out the righteousness of God, He was perfectly manifesting the Kingdom for people to see, hear, touch, smell and taste. He is the way by which people can taste and see that the Lord is good!⁸⁴

Jesus specifically instructed His disciples to proclaim the Gospel of the Kingdom⁸⁵ and do the things He did⁸⁶—actually, even greater things than He did. Hence, the role of *manifesting* God’s Kingdom by proclamation and demonstration is not exclusively for Him as the Christ, but indeed for *all* His disciples, and for *all* of God’s people. This mission of God which Jesus fulfilled is the mission which Jesus sends

82 John 17:4-6, 18, 26. Cf., Kevin DeYoung & Greg Gilbert, *What Is the Mission of the Church? Making Sense of Social Justice, Shalom and the Great Commission* (Crossway, 2011) at 53-59.

83 Matthew 3:2; 4:17; 10:7; Mark 1:5.

84 Psalm 34:8.

85 Matthew 10:7; Luke 9:2.

86 John 14:12.

His followers out on. The very mission we as Christians are called to embark on. *Jesus' life is the perfect expression of God's Kingdom. And He calls us to live that life too.*

Meditation 2: Social Justice in the Kingdom Gospel

What has social justice got to do with the Gospel of the Kingdom of God? First, as we will see later, social justice is an aspect of righteousness which God's Kingdom people were supposed to live out but consistently failed to. Such failure is sin. In other words, our failure to pursue social justice is sin.

Second, social justice is the right way of relationships within God's Kingdom: Right by God, by people and by God's creation. Importantly, God desires for His Kingdom to be in *shalom*, and justice is necessary for *shalom* because "*shalom* is an *ethical* community... the responsible community in which God's laws for the multifaceted existence of his creatures are obeyed".⁸⁷ According to Yoder, God's justice is a response to the lack of *shalom* in order to create the conditions of *shalom*.⁸⁸ It follows then that the pursuit of *shalom* entails the pursuit of justice. And God's Kingdom will not be God's Kingdom without social justice. Imagine heaven was devoid of right relationships between people. Imagine in heaven, people treated one another in heaven with hostility or indifference or unfairly. If you cannot accept this version of heaven, then the necessary inference is that God's Kingdom community on earth today cannot also be as such.

Thus, social justice is an integral aspect of the Kingdom Gospel because it is a facet of God's righteousness which we are to live by but fail, thus

87 Nicholas Wolterstorff, *Until Justice and Peace Embrace* (William B Eerdmans Publishing, 1983).

88 Perry B Yoder, *Shalom: The Bible's Word for Salvation, Justice, and Peace* (Faith & Life Press, 1977), 34.

requiring the grace of the Cross; it is also the right way of relationships which God's Kingdom people on earth, i.e., the Church, and in heaven are supposed to live by. In short, *social justice is integral to the Kingdom Gospel because it is why we fall short, what we are saved for and what we are saved to.*

Meditation 3: The Church as God's Kingdom Community

The Church is God's community founded on the Kingship of Christ. However, the Church is not to be equated with the Kingdom. The Kingdom is all of God's people living under God's rule. *The Church is the community of the Kingdom.* The Kingdom is the rule of God; the church is a society of men.⁸⁹

The Church is empowered by the Holy Spirit to be one united body of Christ,⁹⁰ to love one another and seek the common good of all in the Church,⁹¹ and to be a missionary community.⁹² The Church's acts of love and good works are a manifestation of the Kingdom. The Church is the "primary arena God has chosen to make his redemptive reign over his people visible".⁹³

The Church without the Holy Spirit is merely a human earthly community. The Church led by the Spirit is then an expression of God's Kingdom because God Himself indwells the community. Lesslie Newbigin explains it this way:⁹⁴

It is the community which has begun to taste (even only in foretaste) the reality of the kingdom which alone can provide

89 C René Padilla, *Mission Between the Times* (Langham Monographs, 2010), 203.

90 Ephesians 4:1-6.

91 1 Corinthians 12:4-7.

92 Acts 1:6-8.

93 Kevin DeYoung and Greg Gilbert, *What Is the Mission of the Church? Making Sense of Social Justice, Shalom and the Great Commission* (Crossway, 2011), 127.

94 Lesslie Newbigin, *Sign of the Kingdom* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1980), 19, cited in C René Padilla, *Mission Between the Times* (Langham Monographs, 2010), 205.

the hermeneutic of the message... Without the hermeneutic of such a living community, the message of the kingdom can only become an ideology and a programme; it will not be a gospel.

However, Christians and non-Christians have often been disappointed by other Christians, churches and perhaps the universal Church. Two things have to be borne in mind. First, the Church is a community of individuals who are works-in-progress. Hence, grace is so important. Grace through

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faith justifies us. Grace empowers us to be transformed in sanctification. Grace helps us forgive the failures of others inflicted upon us, as God forgives us. Grace helps us tolerate, even love, the irksome in our community. The second point is that, as the Protestant Reformers would tell us, there are true Christians and there are professing but not true Christians.⁹⁵

Significance of a Holistic Kingdom Gospel

Understanding this holistic Kingdom Gospel is critical. A missionary recounted to me how a pastoral staff told her that he felt his church was losing focus. He felt that the church, in embracing justice and mercy in its core values and activities, was going off on a tangent because justice and mercy are secondary to the Gospel. To him, the Gospel was simply that Christ forgave our sins so that we can be saved from eternal damnation. The missionary was surprised by his comment. How could justice and mercy be secondary to the Gospel? Such a narrow view of the Gospel

95 Matthew 13:24-30.

gives us liberty to tear out every other page in the Bible except Genesis 3 and 1 Corinthians 15; perhaps throw in Romans 3. Why did God bother with giving us so many other texts in the Bible?

Unlike that pastoral staff's narrow view of the Gospel, which many Singaporean Christians hold to, the Kingdom Gospel fully accounts for many important truths revealed by God to us in His Word. It explains how justice, mercy and righteousness are primary to the Gospel. Indeed, they are the way of life by which we fell short and thus sinned. They are what Christ has *saved us to*.

A friend recently mentioned how she once got her campus ministry cell group to conduct a social experiment: They were to ask their non-Christian friends what these friends thought of Christians. The frequently mentioned view was this: "Christians stand *against* many things. But no one knows what they stand *for*."

This is humbling and dismal. Christ stood for many things. How is it that we lost the plot along the way? It occurred to me that the narrow Gospel probably accounts for this. If the Gospel's focus is on sin, forgiveness of sin, and a ticket to eternal life, the outworking of such a Gospel in a Christian's life is necessarily on what we stand against (sin) and belief in Jesus to be saved (forgiveness and eternal life).

But this narrow Gospel is a *negative* view of God's Word. A positive view of God's Word would be a holistic Gospel of God's Kingdom. It would be about the good and right which God desires for the world, which is the justice and righteousness of God. Those are what we should *stand for*. Our failure to live up to them is what we *stand against*.

A holistic appreciation of the Kingdom Gospel also helps us reconcile the tension between 'social action Christianity' on one hand and on the other hand, saving-souls-for-heaven Christianity (which I elaborate on in a later chapter).

The Kingdom Gospel also profoundly impacts how we 'do' Church and live in the tension between the Kingdom of God and the Kingdom of the world.⁹⁶ The Church, constituting Jews and Gentile believers, is the new Israel. And God's Kingdom and its citizens will inevitably stand against the Kingdom of the world: In but not of the world.⁹⁷ It is unsurprising that throughout the biblical narrative, the theme of God and His people coming up against the world's kingdom and powers constantly surfaces: Egypt, Babylon, Assyria, Persia, Greeks, the Roman Empire, etc.⁹⁸ There were good kings and bad kings among these foreign empires. Yet, Jesus is the one true King who would bring perfect peace, justice and righteousness to, and become the Saviour of, the whole world.

At different points in Israel's history, Israel had to negotiate between the elusive hope of her own everlasting king coming to power on the one hand, and the extant reality of an earthly king who could momentarily provide conditions of order, justice and righteousness on the other hand.⁹⁹ As mentioned earlier in the book, during the time of the New Testament, the Roman Caesars adopted for themselves titles and narratives which

96 NT Wright, *How God Became King: The Forgotten Story of the Gospels* (HarperOne, 2012) at 196-209.

97 John 17:14-18.

98 Daniel's interpretation of Nebuchadnezzar's dream in Daniel 2 prophetically suggests that the Israel would be subject to different successive earthly kingdoms before the eternal king would be established.

99 Daniel's interpretation of Nebuchadnezzar's dream in Daniel 4, and in particular Daniel 4:20-22, suggests that earthly pagan kingdoms could be a means by which God provides His blessings of peace and order to the world: Andy Crouch, "Foreword" in Scot McKnight and Joseph B. Modica, eds., *Jesus is Lord Caesar is Not: Evaluating Empire in New Testament Studies* (InterVarsity Press, 2013), 12. However, it is important that these earthly kings do not become conceited and take credit where it belongs to God, or they will be brought low. That was the case for Nebuchadnezzar in Daniel 4 and arguably every earthly king which came subsequently. See also Paul Barnett, "Jesus, Paul and Peter and the Roman State" in Michael Nai-Chiu Poon, ed., *Pilgrims and Citizens: Christian Social Engagement in East Asia Today* (ATF Press, 2006), 68. The Caesar during the time of the Book of Revelation was precisely out of place by declaring himself to be 'Dominus et Deus'. For that reason, the apostle John, through striking prophetic imagery, criticized the emperor as the beast in Revelation 13.

promoted themselves as saviours who could bring *Pax Romana* to the whole world. The New Testament writers subverted this propaganda by declaring Jesus as Son of God, the Saviour of the World. The Roman imperial cult, i.e., the public and private worship of Caesar through temples, propaganda, etc., became prevalent and dominant within the first few decades of the New Testament Church's establishment. Hence, in various passages, the New Testament writers exhorted the Church to direct their allegiance and worship to the true King rather than Caesar.¹⁰⁰ This is as applicable to us today as it was for the early Church. And a holistic Kingdom Gospel helps us appreciate this. A narrow Gospel does not.

Conclusion

In the light of these points of meditation on the Kingdom Gospel, I think we can synthesise them into a broader theological truth: When we as a Church community live out God's righteousness by living justly, we will fulfil God's mission for us to manifest His Kingdom. In other words, *by living a life of integral discipleship, which includes practising biblical social justice, the Church as God's Kingdom community can manifest the Gospel of God's Kingdom.* It is important to note that the consequences of the Kingdom Gospel is not limited to social justice but also relate to other aspects of the Christian faith and Christian living. However, for the purposes of this book, we focus particularly on social justice.

So how exactly is social justice linked to the Kingdom of God? We turn next to examine the biblical passages which I have found to illuminate features of God's Kingdom: God's justice, mercy and righteousness. These help us to understand God's intent for biblical social justice in His Kingdom.

100 NT Wright, "Paul's Gospel and Caesar's Empire", Centre of Theological Inquiry.

Chapter Summary

- The Kingdom Gospel is the good news that God is establishing His Kingdom by gathering His people under His rule on earth and in heaven through Jesus, the long-awaited Christ.
- The entrance into the Kingdom of God is at the Cross of the King.
- The four implications of the Kingdom Gospel is that those who truly believe in Jesus Christ may enjoy reconciliation with God, transformation in the Holy Spirit, membership in the Church as the community of God's Kingdom and a foretaste of *shalom* in God's Kingdom.
- Jesus' life is the perfect expression of God's Kingdom. And He calls us to live that life too.
- Social justice is integral to the Kingdom Gospel because it is why we fall short, what we are saved for and what we are saved to.
- The Church is the community of the Kingdom.
- By living a life of integral discipleship, which includes practising biblical social justice, the Church as God's Kingdom community can manifest the Gospel of God's Kingdom.

Discussion Questions

1. Which aspect(s) of the biblical narrative of the Kingdom of God particularly strike you? Why? What practical implications on your life would these aspect(s) have?
2. How does your life manifest the Kingdom of God now? Do you feel that any facet of this manifestation is missing?
3. How is your faith community expressing the Kingdom of God?
4. How do you think *shalom* can be expressed in your life and your faith community?

INTERVIEW: Bishop Emeritus Robert Solomon



Bishop Emeritus Robert Solomon served as Bishop of The Methodist Church in Singapore from 2000-2012. He had served previously as a medical doctor, church pastor, principal of Trinity Theological College and president of the National Council of Churches of Singapore. Dr Solomon has degrees in medicine, theology, intercultural studies, and a PhD in pastoral theology from the University of Edinburgh. He has contributed many articles to books, theological dictionaries and journals, and authored more than 20 books, including *The Race*, *The Conscience*, *The Enduring Word*, *The Virtuous Life*, *The Sermon of Jesus*, *Apprenticed to Jesus* and *The Trinity and the Christian Life* (Armour Publishing). He now has an active itinerant ministry of preaching and teaching in Singapore and abroad.

1. Do you think that social justice is a key expression of Christian discipleship and witness? Why or why not?

Social justice is an essential part of Christian discipleship because we worship God, who is described in Scripture as just and merciful, righteous and compassionate. He is one who cares about the helpless in society: The orphans, widows and aliens. The prophets in the Bible often spoke against idolatry and socially unjust practices, covering all our relationships, both vertical and horizontal.

2. What do you think is the local church's role in relation to social justice? How do you think the Singapore local churches have fared historically and recently?

The local church can reach out to the underprivileged in its neighbourhood and try to alleviate the sufferings of the poor and the needy. Being good neighbours would be an expression of its life in Christ and its vocation as salt and light, witness and servant. Historically, the local churches have attempted to do some of this, though more can be done with greater understanding of the issues and challenges. The local church itself should be inspired to be a microcosm of a just society—in the same way that the early church was, where resources were radically shared so that there were no needy persons among them (Acts 4:34). The church can seek to be exemplary in the way, for example, individual members treat their domestic helpers or bosses treat their workers.

3. The Methodists have always had a concern for the less well-off in society, and a passion for social action, since the Wesleys. (I understand some people have criticised George Whitefield for lacking in this department.)

How has the Methodist Church in Singapore expressed this since it was established here?

For a long time, the Methodists have been involved in education, having built many schools. In its history, the Methodist Church has also sought to bring healthcare and other services to the needy. Helping the poor has taken many expressions, the most recent being the raising of \$1.8 million to help more than 1000 families in chronic poverty in 2010 and the GOOD (Getting Out Of Poverty) project this year to help families get out of crippling debt.

4. What is the relationship between the local church and the individual Christian in relation to justice and mercy?

The church is only as strong as its individual members. Collective projects to help the weak and powerless are only as strong as individual lifestyles that reflect the same. The church must educate its members about the Bible's teaching on social righteousness and encourage them to practise it in their own spheres of life and influence.

5. How can Singapore local churches disciple and empower believers in relation to justice and mercy? How has the Methodist Church done this?

Teaching, mentoring, exposure to already existing ministries, praying for the challenges and needs and many more. The MCS has done some of these through its local church programmes, but also through its agencies such as the Methodist Welfare Services and the Methodist Missions Society, which encourage overseas trips for members where they can be personally involved in missions work, which often includes social ministries.

6. What do you think is the relationship between social justice and evangelism?

They are to be seen as an integrated whole, like two wings of a bird. It is difficult to share the Gospel without also caring for the physical and social needs of the person(s) we are trying to reach and help. It is also difficult to meet these needs without thinking of the spiritual needs of the person and doing something about it. To reduce the person to a single dimension is not helpful and does not reflect God's concerns and the way we are made. Individuals are part of society and larger systems. Their wellbeing depends on many factors related to the larger spheres, and if these are unrighteous or unjust, one cannot ignore these.

7. How does the tension (if any) between social justice and evangelism play out in a local church?

Sometimes the champions for each see their work in competition—which is unfortunate. A good test is in the range of sermons in the pulpit, what the church prays for, the budgetary allocations, and the number of volunteers in the various ministries.

8. What do you observe about the Singapore Church in relation to social justice?

The church has some blind spots. While members are rightly concerned about moral issues such as sexuality and threats to family, there is often a lack of similar concern about the plight of the poor or the exploitation of the weak, economic issues and the need for policies to protect the powerless and to help those who are left behind by prosperity.

Bishop Emeritus Solomon recently authored a book on social justice, Jesus Our Jubilee (Discovery House, 2015).