

The Gospel and Social Work Practice Faith Integration Strategy by Ken Stoltzfus

Context: In the past I have used versions of this in our Introduction to Social Work course. I am currently working to adapt this for use in our Practice Skills I course to frame social work practice as an opportunity to testify to the reality of Christ's kingdom in the present world and the coming consummation of the kingdom.

Discussion questions: To be completed as homework or groupwork at beginning of class

1. What is your definition of the gospel? Where does this definition come from?
Students often define the gospel as "Jesus died on the cross for my sins." My aim here is to help them to realize that this is a truncated version of the gospel and one that Jesus himself did not teach. This view of the gospel suggests that service to others is helpful only if it leads to a conversion experience, as the only reason for the incarnation is Jesus' eventual crucifixion. This view of the gospel de-emphasizes or even negates Jesus life and ministry.
2. Read Matthew 11:2-6. In this passage, Jesus mentions good news-this term can also be translated "gospel." What is the gospel that Jesus is talking about? Is Jesus' use of the term "gospel" different from your definition? If so, how?
Overview of passage: John the Baptizer has been imprisoned. He sends his disciples to Jesus to ask, "Are you the one who is to come or should we expect another." Jesus responds by stating: "Go back and report to John what you hear and see: The blind receive sight, the lame walk, those who have leprosy are cured, the deaf hear, the dead are raised, and the good news is preached to the poor. Blessed is the man who does not fall away on account of me." This statement is reminiscent of the Old Testament concepts of shalom and Jubilee, which will be discussed during the lesson. In this passage, Jesus states that the gospel has been preached to the poor, despite the fact that Jesus has yet to die on the cross. This passage can be used to extend students' understanding of the gospel. Ron Sider (2005) describes this as "a balanced gospel" a gospel which recognizes the importance of the atonement AND of Christ's earthly ministry.
3. In Matthew 11:2-6, Jesus links his identity as Messiah to a number of groups. What is significant about these groups? Why do you think Jesus uses these groups to establish his identity?
*The groups Jesus discussed were disenfranchised or marginalized. Lepers were unable to participate in Jewish religious life due to being unclean. Scripture suggests that physically disabled individuals were believed to have sinned, or to have been born to sinful parents (See John 9:1-3). The poor have always been oppressed and marginalized.
When reviewing these questions in class, it may be helpful to ask students to identify modern groups which are treated similarly.*

In Class Component

- Review questions (see above)
- Lecture: Jesus proclamation of the Kingdom of God as the embodiment of Shalom (See Powerpoint presentation)
- Discussion: How does this understanding of the gospel relate to social work practice? Micro and macro examples? Points of potential conflict? *I try to help students make connections between social justice, advocacy, work on behalf of populations-at-risk, and the life and ministry of Christ. I also emphasize that the Kingdom is a present reality, but not yet fully formed. Further, the final consummation of the kingdom does not occur due to human effort (the fallacy of liberal theology); rather, our work testifies to the reality of the current kingdom and points expectantly to the future consummation of the kingdom*

Supplemental Reading: Chapter 6, *God's Domination Free Order: Jesus and God's Reign*. From:

Wink, W. (1992). *Engaging the Powers: Discernment and Resistance in a World of Domination*. Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press.

References

Brueggemann, W. (2001). *Peace*. St Louis, MO: Chalice Press.

Roth, J.D. (2002). *Choosing against war: A Christian view*. Intercourse, PA: Good Books.

Sider, R. (2005) *The Scandal of the Evangelical Conscience: Why are Christians living just like the rest of the world?*. Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books.

Wink, W. (1992). *Engaging the Powers: Discernment and Resistance in a World of Domination*. Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press.

Yoder, J.H. (1972). *The politics of Jesus*. Grand Rapids, MI. : Eerdmans Publishing Company.

Social Work and The Kingdom of God

Shalom as Key Hermeneutic

- Shalom has been described as a key biblical theme (Brueggemann, 2001; Roth, 2002)
- What does Shalom mean?
- Peace?
- More accurate to define shalom as a situation characterized by harmony between God, humans, and creation (Brueggemann, 2001; Roth, 2002)

Retelling Biblical Story with Emphasis on Shalom

- Garden of Eden: Adam and Eve intimately connected with each other, named animals, enjoyed direct connection with God

The Fall

- Humans break harmony with God
- God curses humanity
- Harmony with nature lost: animals killed for skins to make clothing, ground no longer yield food without toil
- Humans no longer in harmony: beginning of patriarchy

Hints of Shalom: OT Law and Prophets

- OT law and prophets call God's people (Israel) to live out shalom principles in a fallen, broken world
- Example, Year of Jubilee (Leviticus)
 - *Land returned to rightful owner
 - *Slaves set free
 - *Debts forgiven
- Promoted Shalom (harmony) among people

Jesus and Shalom

Luke 1:46-55 (NIV): Mary's Song

And Mary said: "My soul glorifies the Lord and my spirit rejoices in God my Savior, for he has been mindful of the humble state of his servant. From now on all generations will call me blessed, for the Mighty One has done great things for me — holy is his name. His mercy extends to those who fear him, from generation to generation. He has performed mighty deeds with his arm; he has scattered those who are proud in their inmost thoughts. **He has brought down rulers from their thrones but has lifted up the humble. He has filled the hungry with good things but has sent the rich away empty.** He has helped his servant Israel, remembering to be merciful to Abraham and his descendants forever, even as he said to our fathers."

Jesus as Restoration of Shalom

- Jesus declares a new kingdom
- Kingdom of God characterized by shalom: for example, bringing in of disenfranchised groups (See Matthew 11: 2-6): lepers, women, disabled, Gentiles, “sinners”
- Christ declared kingdom as present reality (Yoder, 1972); this reality was a threat to Roman Empire and Jewish religious hierarchy
- Christ’s kingdom unmasked the “domination system” (powers that be; status quo) (Wink, 1992)

Jesus’ Religious Context

- Jewish Temple in Jerusalem had separate courts for Gentiles, Jewish women, Jewish men, priests, chief priest

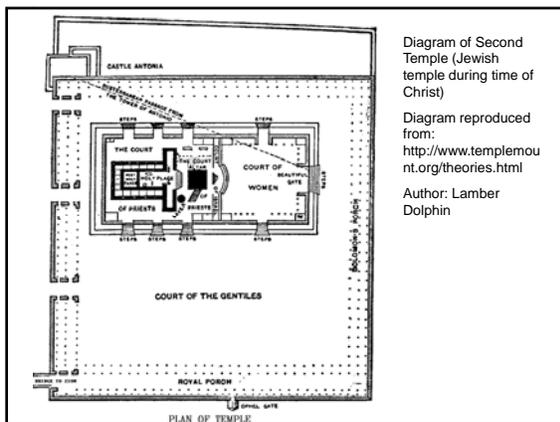


Diagram of Second Temple (Jewish temple during time of Christ)

Diagram reproduced from: <http://www.templemou nt.org/theories.html>

Author: Lamber Dolphin

Inclusion & Social Justice in Kingdom

- Christ’s kingdom confronted hierarchy and exclusion of domination system by including women, Gentiles, disabled, lepers, poor, unclean, “sinners”
- NT reaffirms this. For example: **Galatians 3:28 (NIV)** There is neither Jew nor Greek, slave nor free, male nor female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus

Links between Kingdom and Social Work

- How can social work testify to present reality of Christ’s kingdom?
- Micro examples?
- Macro examples?
- Points of potential conflict between social work and Kingdom (for example, Constantinianism)

A Balanced Gospel (Sider, 2005)

- Christ’s life and death reestablish shalom
 - *Harmonious relationship between God and humans
 - *Harmonious relationships between humans